

PROGRESS IN PRAYER

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CAUSSADE

School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Rosati Kain High School.

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AUTHOR

Progress In Prayer.

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~~School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Rosati Kain High School.~~

**MONASTERY OF ST. ALPHONSUS  
REDEMPTORISTINE NUNS  
LIGUORI, MISSOURI**





# PROGRESS IN PRAYER.

TRANSLATED FROM

## INSTRUCTIONS SPIRITUELLES

par le R. P. CAUSSADE, S. J.

BY

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ADAPTED AND EDITED

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION*

BY

JOSEPH MCSORLEY, C. S. P.

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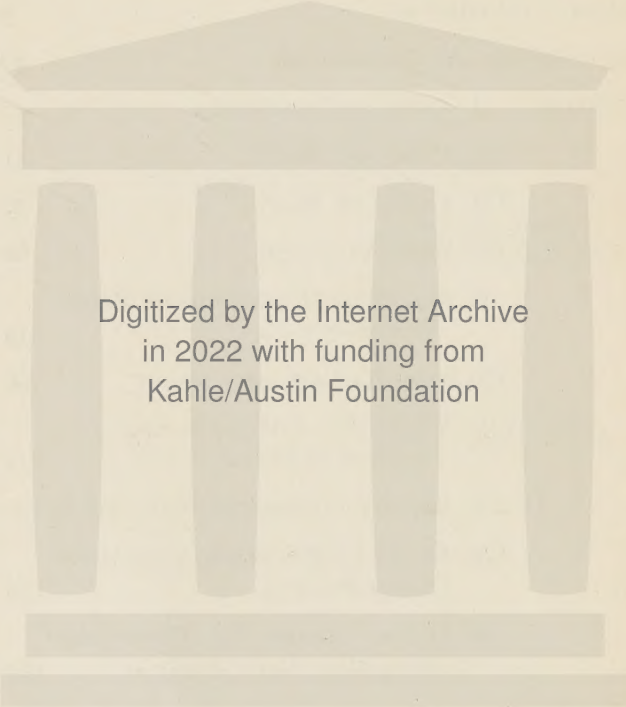
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† JOANNES J. GLENNON,  
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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.

### I.

More convincing than many a theological argument for original sin, is our experience of the unfailing certainty with which evil follows hard upon the advent of good — as Satan, they say, raises a chapel by the side of every house of God. Even that holy instinct which impels the human soul to sympathy and tenderness is full of danger; even the inspirations of our Saviour's teaching and the examples of the saints are made into occasions of wickedness; and among the very saddest scenes of history is that of men and women who have begun with aspiring to climb the mountain of perfection and have ended in the paths that lead to the lowest hell.

So in spiritual science there has ever been a chapter dealing with the illusions to be feared and shunned. St. Teresa censures those who fancy that mere human striving can attain to contemplation; Lallemant rebukes directors for implying that the highest graces of prayer are at the disposal of all men indifferently; Boudon of Evreux quotes a warning given to some who pretended that familiar acquaintance with God's deepest secrets might be enjoyed without incessantly striving for holiness of

life. It all reminds us that one who treads the way of perfection must pursue his quest with the sure eye and the steady foot of an Alpine climber; and that those who quail at the mere thought of falling will never get far in such an adventure as this.

Historically, we can perhaps best verify the need of spiritual caution in the records of the seventeenth century. It happened then, that a number of erroneous conceptions drifted together and formed a system of piety which came near to attaining an international European vogue. The unhappy notoriety of having stood sponsor to the system attaches to the name of Miguel Molinos, a Spanish priest, who settled in Rome about 1667, at the age of forty, and gained great repute there as a director of souls. Laity and clergy alike, sought his advice; and one of his many distinguished friends was Cardinal Odescalchi, afterwards Pope Innocent XI. In 1675, Molinos published his *Guida Spirituale*, a book which, within six years, passed through twenty editions in various languages and became a sort of spiritual manual for groups of his disciples scattered through the different cities of Europe. The new school aimed at being more lofty, more free, more affectionate than the common run; some of its adherents preferred to reject ecclesiastical forms and institutions as useless vanities; and the vision of a purely spiritual and internal religion began to dazzle many with the promise of speedy perfection.

The Jesuits were the first to sound the alarm. In 1681, Father Paolo Segneri undertook the examination and refutation of Molinos in a treatise called *Concordia tra la fatica e la quiete nell' orazione*. A tremendous outcry was raised — but against Segneri. Denounced as blind, ambitious, envious and the calumniator of a saint, he barely escaped death; and for the moment Molinos was raised even higher in the general favor. But the storm had not all blown over. In 1682, Cardinal Carraccioli, writing from Naples, complained to the Pope that unsound spiritual doctrine was spreading through the kingdom and that its upholders went so far as to condemn the practice of meditation, vocal prayer and the spiritual exercise of the imagination; to dispense with all preparation, plan or consideration of subject in mental prayer; to abstain from the use of the Rosary, the Sign of the Cross and sacramental confession; to communicate daily at will; to obey no one; and to believe every thought of their own a divine inspiration. A sense of uneasiness began to affect the authorities; and a second book, which Segneri published in 1685, met with better success than his first. The officers of the Inquisition arrested Molinos together with sixty-six persons of Rome, — including the Count Vespignani, his wife and a number of nobles, — and several hundred others throughout Italy. Investigation showed that the new school had taken deep root.

Nearly all the religious communities of women in the country seemed to be infected; and Cardinal Cibo, in the name of the Inquisition, addressed a letter to the princes, bishops and ecclesiastical superiors of Italy, exposing the dangers and errors of "Quietism," ordering the dissolution of all societies made up of followers of Molinos, and instructing that great care should be taken to prevent convents being attended by confessors imbued with the novel spirituality. Finally, in 1688, Pope Innocent XI. published a Bull confirming the Inquisitors' condemnation of 68 propositions considered close enough to the teaching of Molinos to be called his by implication at least.

Clothed in penitential garb and mounted on a platform in one of the churches of Rome, Molinos was required solemnly to abjure his errors. He remained in prison until his death in 1696; and later traces in Italy of his teaching are unknown.

Whether or not Molinos had ever really taught the gross abominations often ascribed to him, certain it is that in many places Quietism took on such a form and tone as to succeed in attracting many really noble souls. In the following words, Fénelon describes how the new school made its way in his country: "Beneath the show of perfection, the detestable teaching of the Quietists was spreading like gangrene into various parts of France and Belgium; and writings of a character either erroneous or suspi-

cious were exciting rash curiosity amongst the faithful. For several centuries previously, this error had been favored, unwittingly and inculpably, by various mystical writers who, though themselves holding fast to the doctrines of the faith, made mistakes due to an excess of tender piety, combined with a very pardonable knowledge of theological principles and a lack of caution in the use of terms. This fired the zeal of certain illustrious bishops and together with me, they compiled 34 articles and passed various censures on some little books containing passages which, if taken in their most obvious sense, were deserving of condemnation. It is rare, however, that men fly from one extreme without rushing into the other, and, contrary to our intention, this action of ours has by certain persons been made a pretext for ridiculing the love of the contemplative life as a wild chimera." <sup>1</sup>

The baneful teaching to which Fénelon alludes betrayed itself principally in the tendency to regard true love of God as a mere synonym for an uninterrupted state of passive prayer, and consequently to recommend the suppression of all distinct acts of faith and hope, all petitions, thanksgivings and reflections. Chief among the pious booklets circulated in France at the time were those written by Mme. Guyon. Born at Montargis in 1648, this lady, wedded at sixteen and widowed at twenty-eight, had entered a religious

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Pope, 27. April, 1697.



community at Gex by the invitation of the Bishop. After her exit, she visited various cities of France, returning finally to Paris in 1687. But her two books, *Moyen court et très facile pour l'oraison* and *L'explication mystique du Cantique des Cantiques* excited such suspicions of heterodoxy that Mgr. Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, had her arrested and examined as to her spiritual doctrine. After various accusations and debates, the matter was handed over to a commission made up of Bossuet, M. Tronson, Superior of Saint Sulpice, and Bishop de Noailles of Chalons. During the course of some six or eight months, these three met frequently, to discuss and formulate the Catholic doctrines on mystical prayer; and, after Fénelon had become Archbishop of Cambray, he also attended their meetings. The result of the discussions finally took shape in the thirty-four articles of Issy, published March 10th, 1695. Already Mgr. Harlay had condemned the books in question and Bossuet and de Noailles, on returning to their dioceses, repeated the condemnation. Bossuet then began the writing of his famous *États d'Oraison*, in order to expose the errors of the false mystics and to spread a knowledge of the true doctrine of the Church concerning contemplative prayer. As originally projected, the work was to contain five treatises. Rather unfortunately, however, only the first of them was published. The second remained in manuscript up to

the year 1897; and the other three were never even so much as written out.

The effect of the treatise published was noticeable enough. Backed by the authority of the most eminent churchmen in France and, to all appearances, doubly reinforced by the outcome of Bossuet's unfortunate controversy with Fénélon, it exercised an influence that, on the whole, was rather too far-reaching and profound. Anxious as the Issy conference had been to safeguard the Church's real doctrine on prayer, and determined though Bossuet was to follow up his attack on the false mystics with a defense of the true, yet the inevitable reaction which set in carried nearly everyone off solid ground. Henceforth, partly because contemplative prayer suggested Quietism and partly because the suspicion of a taint might lead to a residence in the Bastille, none dared to breathe even the name of contemplation. As a controversialist, indeed, Bossuet had been crowned with success; but the consequence of his victory was that the finest flower of Catholic spirituality lay in danger of being crushed utterly out of existence.

The next generation of Catholics grew up to look upon contemplative prayer and the teaching of the mystics as things girt round with danger, and very carefully to be shunned by all who held spiritual or even temporal safety in any regard. Naturally enough, this condition was irksome and unsatisfactory to deeper

minds who appreciated the immense importance of the truths thus discredited by error, and who perceived the consequences certain to follow a general suppression of mystical aspirations. To correct the evil tendency, however, was neither a simple nor a safe undertaking. So most of those who might have stemmed the tide that was sweeping Catholic spirituality down to such low levels contented themselves with quietly fostering the higher life in their own souls and holding entirely aloof from discussions.

Such was the condition of affairs when Père Causade came upon the scene. English readers today know this man almost exclusively through the precious little book *Abandonment*, published at Le Puy, in 1861, by Father Ramière, after astonishing exertions, re-edited a number of times in at least five languages, and introduced (in part) to the American public by Miss Ella McMahon at Father Hecker's suggestion in 1887. But the writer of *Abandonment* during his lifetime did other good work, too. Admitted to the Jesuit novitiate of the Toulouse province in 1693, he became professor of grammar at Auch three years later, lived at Nancy for a while, was stationed at Albi as rector, and died at Toulouse in 1751; and, though but scant information is at hand as to the way his time was spent, he has left behind him a glorious and enduring monument in the brief record we do possess. While at Nancy, Father Caussade came into close

contact with the religious of the Visitation there, and in the volumes of *L'Année Sainte*<sup>1</sup> we find abundant evidence of the powerful influence he exercised over souls aspiring to lives of holiness. Among the nuns were some whose vocation had been decided with his assistance; and, at the convent, all considered his conferences, his private counsel and his letters of direction to be among the very best aids to perfection that the community possessed. One of the nuns, Sr. Marie Anne-Sophie de Rottenbourg (who died in 1775 in the seventy-ninth year of her profession) collected a number of letters received from Father Caussade into a little treatise; and this treatise it is which today goes by the name of "Abandonment to Divine Providence" — a phrase ever on the author's lips and pen, and truly significant of the abiding disposition which he tried to awaken in souls under his care.

At what particular source Father Caussade had drunk in his enthusiasm for the contemplative life, we have no means of knowing; nor can we tell how he had first been drawn to the reading of the older spiritual teachers, to the pages redolent of that mystical odor so eagerly sought and so gladly welcomed by souls like his. Perhaps it was Suarez' treatise on Mental Prayer that first set him thinking; or maybe a chapter by St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, or Le Gaudier, or De

<sup>1</sup> *Année Sainte des Religieuses de la Visitation de Ste. Marie.* Annecy: Ch. Burdet — 1868 — 1869 — 1870 — 1871. (12 vols.)

Paz. Possibly it was Da Ponte's Life of Balthasar Alvarez, or Lallemant's doctrine on the Holy Spirit, or a book by Rigoleuc, or Surin, or Guilloiré that burst into his life and swayed his path towards new ways of thought and prayer. But wherever the first impulse came from, it introduced him to a kind of literature which his soul, thereafter, always loved to feed upon. Lastingly grateful for his treasure-trove, he determined that those around him should enjoy further instruction in the science of the saints than had hitherto been accorded them. His heart was heavy with a sense of the wrongs endured by Catholics shut out from their priceless birthright of spiritual doctrine; and he recognized that the Church was suffering serious harm from the prevalent tendency to belittle contemplative prayer or to speak of it only for the purpose of uttering warnings against it. To Causade it was as if these speeches had been warnings against the abuses attaching to frequent communion or to devotion towards our Blessed Lady. Independently of all question about good or bad intention, such words were, he considered, merely an indirect method of decrying precious things.<sup>1</sup>

So Père Causade set himself resolutely to the task of improving the situation. In his letters we find how continually he strove to hold up mystical ideals to the veneration and imitation of his spiritual children; and *L'Année Sainte* gives much evidence of the strik-

<sup>1</sup> *Instructions spirituelles*, pt. I, dial. 16.



ing success that rewarded his efforts. But to influence the souls with whom he came into immediate contact would not suffice; and he decided, by means of an explanatory comment on Bossuet's famous book, to provide an effective and permanent instrument for the upholding and spreading of the sublime teaching that had come down from Catholic antiquity. Dividing his treatise in two parts, one doctrinal and technical, the other practical and popular, he put it forth under the shelter of Bossuet's authority, as an explanation of contemplative prayer and a protest against the disposition to ignore those fields of spiritual activity which lie outside the confines of formal meditation. At the first he judged it wise to conceal his authorship; and the original edition of the Instructions on prayer was published at Perpignan, in 1741, as the work of Père Gabriel Antoine. Antoine was a Jesuit writer, already well known as the author of several spiritual books (one of them, *Courtes méditations*, republished by Poussielgue, Paris, 1882), and of a *Cours de Théologie Morale* which Benedict XIV. introduced into the Propaganda. Antoine had been with Caussade in the novitiate and, doubtless, they were confidential friends, for it was no small favor to accept the paternity of the new book "in order to give it greater credit with the public."<sup>1</sup> By way of further

<sup>1</sup> This being the motive for the selection of Antoine's name, according to the Pères de Backer: *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, s. v. Antoine.

guarantee, the work bore the approval of two official censors, M. Saunier, Docteur en Théologie, Ex-professeur, Chanoine, Pénitencier, Archidiacre, Official et Grand Vicaire, and R. P. Amanrich, Prieur du Couvent des Frères Prêcheurs de Perpignan, Docteur en Théologie, Professeur royal, Doyen de la Faculté et Examineur synodal. An interesting detail in the warm recommendation given by these censors is that they extended approval all the more willingly "because the theologian responsible for the publication has shown himself worthy of esteem and approbation by his various treatises of scholastic and moral theology so generally approved in France." Then followed an indorsement by the Jesuit Provincial of Champagne, certifying that the book had been submitted to the censorship of three theologians of the Society and might lawfully be printed. Finally, came the authorization of the Procureur General du Roi.

Thus armed and armored, the little volume commenced a career destined to be truly remarkable. Within a few years, a second edition was published at Toulouse, still without the true authorship being disclosed — a wise enough precaution for a man who valued peace as much as did Caussade, since there were many ready to spread most uncomfortable reports about the book and its author. It wanted but a few years then of the time when, — he being dead and his connection with the volume known, — the Jansenist

writers of *Les Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques* should set down the Instructions on Prayer as "an attempt to insinuate Quietism under the name and authority of the great Bossuet."<sup>1</sup> But by this date Caussade was beyond the reach of calumny, and whether or not his ears had once been wounded by such like denunciation we cannot easily tell.

The subsequent history of the book is the best testimony to its real merit. Time and again, it has been recalled from oblivion to carry its message of comfort and inspiration to generation after generation. The third edition (Perpignan, 1758) contained only the practical portion of the book, the editor alleging that the technical defensive part had already served its purpose, since theologians universally recognized the soundness of Caussade's doctrine, and since the average reader cared for the practical portion only. Subsequent editions followed this precedent, as at Paris (1810), at Anvers (1824), at Tournai (1852), at Rheims (1891), and at Paris (1892). The one exception to this was the edition of Avignon (1825) prepared by "G"<sup>2</sup> and reproducing, with some verbal

<sup>1</sup> *Table Raisonnée et Alphabétique des Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques, depuis 1728 jusqu'en 1760 inclusivement.* The entry states pointedly: "cinq de ses confrères participent à l'impression."

<sup>2</sup> M. Levesque of Paris, directeur au Séminaire Saint Sulpice, informs us that "G" stands for M. Gosselin, once the superior of the seminary of Issy and editor of *Les Œuvres de Fénelon*.

corrections and a few notes, the whole of the original publication of 1741. To M. Bussenot, the editor of the Rheims and Paris editions, Cardinal Langénieux wrote that the work of re-editing Caussade's book had been "truly inspired." Both these editions were quickly exhausted and the work is now again out of print, though but temporarily, of course. Meanwhile, at the instance of Père Ludovic Besse,<sup>1</sup> a Capuchin and an ardent admirer of Caussade, the long-forgotten doctrinal part of the work has been re-edited by M. Bussenot (Paris, 1895). The two publications of M. Bussenot and the edition of M. Gosselin were the texts used in the preparation of the present English version, in which, it may now be noted, various wide departures from literal translation have been made, always at the responsibility of the editor.

## II.

Father Caussade composed his treatise out of a deep sense of the harm due to lack of acquaintance with the Catholic teaching about prayer. He felt that the want of proper instruction was holding many a soul back from the realization of its truly noble possibilities; and he published these pages in the hope that they would be read widely in a spirit at once studious and religious. It seems well, therefore, that

<sup>1</sup> His recent publication *Science de la Prière* (Paris, Oudin) is well worth reading.

we should prepare our minds at the outset by a reconsideration of certain familiar truths bearing on the soul's relationship with God.

Reason and revelation alike, tell us that the ultimate destiny of the human soul is union with the Deity; and that this union is to be attained by the exercise of faculties and the play of tendencies set by the Creator in the nature of man. 'The highest operations of a rational being are to contemplate truth with the intellect and to embrace good with the will; and by grace these powers have been exalted to such a degree that they surpass the range of a mere creature's existence and share in an activity which by nature is the proper life of God. In consequence, man has been destined to see God with a clearness and to love Him with a fulness transcending all human conceptions. Once this blessed vision and blessed union have been attained, perfect happiness will possess the soul and man's spiritual hunger and thirst will be satiated so completely that in an eternity he can never want.

Ideal existence on earth would mean a life of growth toward this final consummation, a life in which man's noblest powers should retain their due supremacy, God being contemplated and loved as the perfect Truth and the perfect Good, and each faculty helping to establish and to perfect the soul's union with Divinity. As a matter of fact, however, man in his fallen state finds life strangely discordant; his



mind and will persist in going astray ; his animal nature rises up in rebellion ; and lesser goods contest with God the right to engage the supreme interest and affection of the soul. This strife disturbs the peace of man's spirit ; the movements of life swing him hither and thither, more often away from than toward his end of being ; and heroic effort is required to reduce the unruly passions to order and enlist them in the cause of right. Externally, he has to overcome the numerous obstacles that make against the faithful observance of the whole natural and positive law. Internally, he has to conquer his own soul in order to bring it into Godlike contemplation of infinite Truth and Godlike love of infinite Good. Mere instinct and spontaneous impulse will not suffice. Resolute effort must be added, and the influence of grace superadded, that he may lead a life which will truly resemble God's, and be, in a real sense, a preparation for and a growth toward the destined life of heaven.

Of the two fields of struggle, outer and inner, the latter is by far the more important, both because of its greater intrinsic nobleness and because it exercises a dominant influence over conduct. Hence the primary need is a right ordering of the internal activities.

It is at the securing of this that spiritual exercises aim. Prayer, for instance, means that for the moment, a human soul is living somewhat as it will live eternally in heaven, mentally contemplating and

voluntarily loving the Supreme Object of thought and affection, though now that Object is seen but dimly and loved only insecurely. Each exercise of true prayer renders the soul a little more like God and leaves it a little less unfit to abide eternally in His presence and to live the life He lives.

But we find it hard to pray. Not all the philosophy in the world can make it easy for us to turn away from the sensual things that solicit us and to begin communing with God. To set aside distracting thoughts and for the moment to forget all selfish interests, to rise in spirit above created things and to contemplate the Creator of them, to resign cheerfully the objects for which body or soul is hungering and clamoring, and to do all this, as it were, off-hand and on the instant: this is not given to man even by grace. Herein, as elsewhere, he lies under the law of labor. Toil and struggle, effort and pain must precede attainment. Only after the expenditure of tears and blood shall he be able to stand at liberty and to speak with God as one who knows and is known, who loves and is beloved.

The big issue of life, therefore, is this: How shall a man set about the winning back of his lost birth-right? What means had he best adopt in order that once more he may possess the privilege of communing with God and once more enjoy the liberty of God's children?

Man's highest power is the power of willing. By the habitual attitude of his will he is classed as noble or base ; and by the acts of his will he is saved or lost. To will rather than to know is the splendid gift that differentiates man from brute. Whether or not external success has been achieved, the one who goes down to his grave with a will set unflinchingly on good, carries with him the deepest heart-worship of his fellows ; and a child that has the will of a hero is reckoned a greater glory to the race than the wisest scholar.

Yet we must recognize that the will is largely a dependent faculty and that it has to be directed by a mind which is contemplating truth. In a sense, all goodness is bound up with wisdom ; and to dazzle or distract the mind is to interfere thus far with the perfect action of the will. If the intellect view the world in a false light, or a wrong order ; if the perception of God's relationship with Creatures be distorted or imperfect ; then, there is a likelihood of the will's directing its activity in opposition to God, thus rendering itself sterile and its energy of no avail. When Essential and Absolute Truth is seen clearly, as in heaven, the will, of course, darts swiftly and infallibly at the Good ; but, outside of heaven, the chances of right action vary with the soul's greater or lesser success in conceiving of the world of things under true relations. Hence the schooling of man's spirit must consist

largely in his learning to look upon God so constantly and attentively, that with ever growing ease he may pierce through all disguises and instantly recognize Truth and Beauty and Goodness, wherever they exist, — properly estimating the value of each finite thing, and exactly realizing the measure in which it will aid or hinder him to make progress towards perfection. On the other hand, it is only by ignorance of one sort or another that he can be prevented from going straight to God. Only when he fails to see are his feet enmeshed in snares or turned towards pitfalls. So what he must beg for first is light.

Oftentimes, it is merely an ignorance born of inattentiveness that troubles the soul. Then the correction is to be found in a concentration of thought which will bring us to see things in their true perspective and to realize their exact worth. Herein lies the value of meditation, an exercise in which the soul's powers are employed upon some truth or fact for the purpose of developing and impressing on the mind the spiritual significance contained. The memory is made to recall the subject; the imagination is stimulated to an extent befitting the character of the meditating mind and the matter in question; the intellect proceeds to analyze, to discuss and to compare; until, under the spell of truth thus made vivid, the emotional nature awakens and the will is drawn strongly to the choosing and embracing of the good.

The efficacy of meditation as a help to prayer is proportionate to its power of revealing or clarifying truth, and of thus eliciting response from the will; and the measure of a good meditation is the measure of strength and reality in the consequent movement of the soul towards God. It serves much the same purpose as the chafing which makes penmanship possible to benumbed fingers, or the preparatory exercise which limbers muscle for a trial of strength. As a man who dwells upon the memory of an insult will rouse himself to anger, hatred and the desire of revenge, so one who contemplates the things of God will be moved to sorrow for sin and new longing for holiness — a principle to which St. Ignatius drew the world's attention so successfully that it can never again be excusably ignored.

Meditation, then, is based on a recognized psychological law, — the permanent element common to all the various methods employed by different individuals or suggested by changing circumstances. At any given time the best form is, of course, that which most efficiently moves the will towards intimate union with God. The practice of meditating is necessary whenever, and in so far as, the will requires it; but, when not needed to induce or to intensify the act of the will, it may properly be dispensed with. In form, it allows of indefinite variations both as to plan adopted and subject dwelt upon. Necessarily so;



since the mind in question may be that of a sodden sinner unused to any good thought, or the holy mind of an innocent, shrinking child; and since the influences to be counteracted may be such as play on the will of a poet or of a tradesman, or again of a mathematician; while each meditation is to combine the intellectual, emotional and practical elements in proportions suitable to the requirements of the particular case.

From the preceding, it will appear that meditation is well-nigh indispensable for all who, while aspiring to close union with God, are distracted from sustained attention to Him either by inordinate liking for, or teasing solicitude about created goods; and that the need of meditation is greater or less, accordingly as the mind is wont to picture hazily or vividly the supreme desirableness of God. Under favorable conditions, meditation should, of course, be but a temporary stage of the soul's growth in divine likeness. Allowing for variations, such growth should in general follow the ordinary laws of mental development; for progress up to and beyond this point requires only ordinary grace which will never be wanting. Hence fervent souls, fitted by disposition and circumstances for a higher form of prayer, may look to acquire the power of communing with God more perfectly than can be done in a formal meditation. Spiritual writers give us to understand that the average person, after

a reasonable time spent in the practice of meditation, — not to mention those rarer souls who even at first may dispense with tedious discursive processes, — can get the fruit of meditation without meditating, that is, can elicit acts of praise, thanksgiving, trust, love and other affections habitually, easily, and independently of preceding consideration. This means that by degrees the intellect acts less and the will more; that the mind grows satisfied more quickly and with a lesser variety of thoughts. So the exercise can no longer be regarded as an intellectual one or be called meditation; because the play of affection and will has been substituted almost entirely for that of the discursive powers, and analysis is replaced by contemplation.

This advance in prayer is marked first by the will's readier response to the suggestions of each doctrine or fact presented. As progress goes on, less and less study is needed in order to produce the mental illumination that precedes every movement of the soul. In other words, the activity of the will increases; and, in a proportional measure, the range and activity of mental work lessen.

That movement by which the soul leaps toward God, upon the suggestion offered by a vivid realization of His desirableness, is called in the language of Catholic writers, an affection of the soul. And when there has come a noticeable decrease in the amount of

mental labor prerequisite for the eliciting of such affections; when they come easily, quickly, almost spontaneously; then, the soul is said to have passed beyond the first stage of progress, to have exchanged meditation for affective prayer, and to be entering upon the "illuminative way", — illuminative in a double sense, since the affections in turn perfect perception, just as our senses grow keen to detect the presence or the voice of one we love.

In due time, these affectionate movements of the soul become still simpler. Some one particular affection rises out of the crowd and acquires predominance, and to this the soul recurs by preference again and again; or rather, a supreme affection, which appears to sum up and include the others, commences to satisfy the soul as being the simple expression of all its sentiments. A phrase like *Deus meus et omnia*, whether spoken or unspoken, exhausts and sufficiently voices the thought of the mind. With little or no meditative reflection, this affection is now elicited, quietly and almost constantly; for though the soul cannot, indeed, at every instant be multiplying and carefully repeating its act of worship, it can and does acquire a disposition, a habit, an attitude, a temper which is practically permanent and abiding.

Catholic teachers of spirituality often call this kind of prayer "acquired contemplation," and tell us it is the highest state which man can attain without a

grace quite beyond the ordinary. At the same time they teach that common souls who are industrious, consistent and wisely guided, may lawfully desire and reasonably hope to advance as far as this. As a matter of fact, too few, it is said, venture to mount as high as God wishes them to go. A little more confidence in God ; a little more forgetfulness of self ; and there would be many souls enjoying closer intimacy with their Creator than they have ever dreamed to be possible. Indeed, the prayer above described may very properly be considered as a humble attempt of some on earth to imitate that blessed life for which all are destined in heaven. It is less a formal exercise than a lover's vision. It is the loving soul's responsive attention to the stimulus of the divine presence. "He is here:" the memory recalls, the intellect contemplates, the will desires and chooses and reaches out toward the Beloved.

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It was the encouragement and direction of souls in prayer of this sort that Father Caussade had in view when he wrote the treatise before us. No doubt such prayer can be and indeed often has been practiced by persons unacquainted with the principles concerned in its acquisition ; just as people frequently profit by sanitary laws of which they are totally ignorant. Yet it is of no little value to be instructed in these matters and to understand something about the various

phenomena of the soul's growth into fulness of stature, — as in any field of knowledge it is helpful to be conversant with the experience of others and to know the methods and expedients that one's predecessors have found useful. This is why we may anticipate that the same motives which induced Father Caussade to compose, will lead many others to approve and to recommend the treatise which here follows.

NOTE:—It may be well to mention here that Father Wilberforce's translation of the *Spiritual Instruction* of Blossius (St. Louis, B. Herder) contains a great deal of valuable teaching about the progress in prayer that is possible to souls of good will. — *Ed.*

## INTRODUCTORY.

### AN EXPLANATION.

Q. Bossuet in his Treatise on Prayer<sup>1</sup> tells us that the mystics pray by means of "direct acts" of the soul; and he says of these acts that they are not "reflex" and indeed, are scarcely perceived by the person making them. He adds that "direct acts" are made by the heart alone, without being outwardly expressed or even consciously formulated. Now can you not help me to understand all this a little better?

A. I believe I can. Bossuet is referring to a certain kind of prayer which consists merely of loving attention to the presence of God. In such prayer souls experience a supernatural attraction which makes them feel toward God, almost the same as we feel toward persons whom we love naturally.

What he says will be understood better perhaps, if we consider the state of a mother's soul when she is thinking of her darling boy. How does her motherly love come into play except by "direct acts," that is by simple interior movements and tendencies? These acts are "direct," not "reflex," that is to say the mother is loving her boy rather than thinking of her

<sup>1</sup> *Instruction sur les états d'oraison.*



love of him. Again, she is but vaguely conscious of her own feelings, since she does not attend to the exact nature of what is going on in her own soul. Her acts of love are not expressed, for neither with lips nor with heart does she say "I love thee"; yet all the time she is really making true acts of love interiorly. She manifests her love only by loving. If her son could read hearts, as God does, would he not see his mother's soul full of tenderness for him? Assuredly he would.

Now, were the object of her affection sinful, the mother would certainly accuse herself in confession of having spent considerable time in a wicked condition of soul; so, I think we may say that though the acts in question are not "reflex" but only "direct," yet they are truly voluntary and deliberate. In fact, precisely because they are not explicitly reflected upon, they are apt to be more simple, natural, sincere and deep. And this is just what Bossuet says about the "direct acts" made in prayer.<sup>1</sup>

*Q.* Another question, if you please. What does Bossuet mean by saying that a will fixed on God produces a series of good movements which amount to a perpetual prayer?<sup>2</sup>

*A.* He means that the disposition of a virtuous will toward God is something like the disposition of a

<sup>1</sup> *Instruction*, l. V, § 5.

<sup>2</sup> l. VI, § 43.

wicked will toward sin. Now a sinful will produces a constant succession of thoughts, affections, desires, hopes, joys, fears, regrets, and many other simple movements which are both deliberate and wicked. Bossuet wishes us to understand that God sees the good inclinations of a soul as well as the bad, and is even more disposed to reward good dispositions than to punish evil ones. Recall Article XIX of Issy: "Perpetual prayer does not consist of one long uninterrupted act, but rather of an habitual permanent disposition or readiness to avoid whatever displeases God and to perform whatever pleases Him." Now an abiding disposition of this sort results only from a long series of acts of the will moving away from evil and toward good.

Q. How then, does it happen that ordinary good people so easily recognize the malice of each evil "direct act," even of the least thought, complacency, affection or attachment, and are sure to mention all such matters in confession; while, on the other hand, they fail properly to appreciate the value of simple deliberate movements towards good, that is to say, of good "direct acts"?

A. Well, in the first place, we are usually more conscious of our evil than of our good tendencies. Again, a great many people get a false notion of this matter from what books and sermons teach about the uselessness of good intentions without works. For

while it is perfectly true that without works good intentions will not save us, yet in themselves these intentions are meritorious; just as evil intentions are blameworthy even though not carried into execution. Our Lord said that from the heart comes forth all evil; <sup>1</sup> and the same is to be said of all good. Hence, experienced confessors esteem dispositions and intentions so highly that they tell us to make sure of these and not to place too much reliance on fine resolutions or beautiful acts of contrition and purposes of amendment.

*Q.* What does Bossuet mean when he says that certain souls pray with a disposition so fervent that it resembles a group of acts rather than one single act? <sup>2</sup>

*A.* He refers to the consequence of frequent and intense repetition of pious acts. Let me illustrate this by referring to a wicked soul full of the worst dispositions. In such a one the criminal affections gather together and as it were, impenetrate one another, forming a complication of sins. So it is with a good soul whose disposition is a sort of composite of various affections. The one great difference is that our inclination to evil maintains itself only too easily, whereas our inclination to good needs to be guarded continually and frequently to be renewed.

*Q.* Will you please explain the meaning of

<sup>1</sup> Mt. XV, 19; Mk. VII, 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1. VIII, § 36.

Bossuet's statement that mystical prayer teaches us to speak the pure language of the heart. Until we attain to this, he says, we always speak a human language and clothe our thoughts in words, just as in addressing our fellow-men. But after having attained to contemplation and pure recollection, we learn the language of the heart and speak to God in a way that He alone understands.<sup>1</sup>

A. Bossuet means that the heart conveys to God what cannot be framed in words, but can be expressed only by simple movements, by interior cries and groans, and by longings unutterable even by the person who silently directs them heavenward. Human words express a deep emotion very feebly. Men show this when, after having tried their best to express their affection and friendship, they add: "Would that you could see the feelings of my heart!" Now God sees and understands what men can neither perceive nor express. The Prophet tells us that God sees even the preparation of our hearts,<sup>2</sup> that is to say, explains Bossuet, even the initial movement of the heart by which "it first sets about wishing to form a desire."<sup>3</sup>

Q. And now, as to the various names Bossuet gives to this prayer of direct acts; why, for instance, does he call it simple recollection?

<sup>1</sup> 1. V, § 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. X, (Heb). 17.

<sup>3</sup> 1. V, § 24.

A. Because during this kind of prayer the soul is simply recollected in God.

Q. How is such recollection brought about?

A. Sometimes merely with the help of ordinary grace which enables us to enter into ourselves seriously, like men who wish to study hard, or to consider an important business affair. This kind of recollection is called active, because here we make use of our own powers and industry to recall our thoughts and affections scattered about and dispersed in the world of sense. Do you not remember St. Teresa's saying that during prayer the soul coils herself up like a snail in its shell and tries to think only of God the Holy Ghost abiding within her in His living temple?

On other occasions recollection is bestowed by means of a special divine attraction which actually draws the soul into herself.

Q. I do not follow you.

A. Well, as this point has been explained by St. Francis de Sales, who was familiar with both the theory and the practice of such prayer, and as Bossuet has declared St. Francis unquestionably the best authority of his age, perhaps I cannot do better than to quote you a passage from the *Treatise on the Love of God* :

"Sometimes it happens that our Lord infuses into the heart a certain delight to serve as a token of His presence ; and then all our powers and inner senses

turn as by a secret instinct toward the inmost depths of the soul, there to enjoy the company of this most dear and most amiable Spouse. For just as a swarm of bees about to take flight and abandon home is attracted by the gentle tapping of metal basins, or by the smell of honied wine, or by the scent of odoriferous herbs, and thus led into the hive that has been prepared, so our Saviour, by speaking some word of love, or by spreading abroad the fragrance of His garments, — that is by communicating some heavenly consolation which makes His dear Presence felt in our hearts — draws all our faculties to gather around and rest in Him as in the object of their longings. Or as a lodestone set amid a number of needles makes them first turn towards and then move up into contact with itself, so does the delightful sense of God's presence in the soul influence our faculties to turn in His direction and reach out towards Him." <sup>1</sup>

Q. Why does Bossuet speak of "the prayer of simplicity" and "the prayer of silence"?

A. He uses the first name because nothing is so simple as this prayer which in truth is merely the language of the heart, with simple volitions or "direct acts" serving as words. He uses the second name because during this prayer the soul often remains in profound silence on the alert to catch the voice of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise on the Love of God.* Bk. VI, ch. VII.



It is to be noted also, that at times the silence maintained during prayer resembles that respectful and admiring stillness observed in royal courts and considered to be the most flattering kind of homage. Bossuet says that God cannot be honored better than by such silence, which may serve, he tells us, as an entrance to contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Remember the saying, "Lord, silence is Thy praise."

*Q.* Why should this prayer be described as a simple regard, or look, or as a contemplation?

*A.* Because in it we are simply looking at God by faith with loving attention. As we can look at material objects with our bodily sight and at spiritual objects with our spiritual sight, so we can look at divine things with the eyes of faith. Now if this look at God lasts but a moment, it is no more than a good transient act; but if by fidelity to ordinary grace or by special favor, we acquire the ability to sustain this interior look for a comparatively long time, then so long as our loving look lasts we are making what Bossuet calls a prayer of "simple regard." If little by little, this becomes continuous, in the sense explained by Bossuet, then we shall have attained to the observance of God's command to Abraham: "Walk before Me and be perfect."<sup>2</sup>

*Q.* Why does Bossuet speak of this prayer as a simple surrender or abandonment to God?

<sup>1</sup> 1. II, § 13.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. XVII, 1.

A. He explains that himself in his discussion of the prayer of Saint Chantal.<sup>1</sup>

Q. Well then, tell me what he means by calling it the prayer of repose and of quiet, — expressions apt to convey to many minds only the idea of idleness and waste of time?

A. In order to understand these expressions we must, first of all, realize that the mind and heart do not rest as the body does by ceasing to act, but rather by acting in a simpler, more pleasant way. So when a miser lets his thoughts rest on his riches, or the ambitious man on his desired end, or anyone on the object of his love, in these cases mind and heart have not ceased to act and are in no sense idle. On the contrary, they are very criminally occupied; for the man's thoughts and affections are all the time fixed voluntarily on some creature, delighting and resting therein as in their central interest—a condition which St. Paul describes as idolatry.<sup>2</sup> If the corruption of nature can cause this sinful resting in creatures that we have fashioned into vain idols, is it any wonder that habit, which is a second nature, together with grace which is even stronger than habit, can cause that holy repose of mind and heart which good souls experience in tasting or in thinking of God their true center and one treasure on Whom their hearts are set

<sup>1</sup> 1. VIII, § 26.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. V, 5; Col. VII, 5.

and their wills fixed? Now do you not see why this has been called the prayer of repose and of quiet?

*Q.* Another question. Does this prayer of repose consist of one or of several acts?

*A.* Sometimes it consists of a single act continued for a length of time proportional to the intensity of the love producing it. At other times, it consists of a successive series of uniform acts free from interruption or interior disturbance. All these, of course, are acts of love, since our hearts repose only in what we love and proportionately to our love.

During this prayer, then, God is really loved and adored by the heart "in spirit and in truth."<sup>1</sup> The mystics all assert that such prayer is nothing else but a pure exercise of true charity and consequently that it includes whatever is necessary to please God and to advance in the way of perfection.

This opinion is confirmed and explained further by Article XIII of Issy, which says: "In the most perfect prayer, all these acts (i. e. faith, hope, charity, desire, petition etc.) are summed up in charity inasmuch as it inspires all the virtues and prescribes the exercise of them, according to St. Paul's teaching: *Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*"<sup>2</sup> He might with equal truth have said the same of the various other Christian acts, all of which charity dictates the distinct practice

<sup>1</sup> Jn. IV, 23.

<sup>2</sup> I. Cor. XIII, 7.

of, although such practice may not always be sensibly and distinctly perceived."

Q. What is the significance of the last sentence of the Article?

A. It is intended to correct a very common error. You must know that because the "direct acts" of the prayer of quiet are often imperceptible, therefore many persons shrink from this practice, some through fear of wasting time in idleness, or of omitting acts prescribed, others through an unreasonable dread of committing heresy by resting in this sweet and holy repose. The acts performed during this repose, however, though but vaguely perceptible, are utterly inconsistent with the so-called repose of Quietism which absolutely rejects and annihilates all acts at the very first moment of their appearance.<sup>1</sup>

Q. Did Bossuet himself invent these various names we have been discussing?

A. No; he borrowed them from the mystics, ancient and modern, who drew them from their own experience. Each mystic named his prayer after the chief sentiment experienced by himself. Thus some called it the prayer of simplicity because of their strong sense of the simple presence of God. Others spoke of repose, or of contemplation, or of simple recollection, or of admiring silence, accordingly as they were thinking of the heart, the mind, the inmost

<sup>1</sup> 1. V, § 27.

soul, or the faculties. Others again, spoke of simple surrender or total abandonment to the good pleasure of God.

*Q.* And now finally, why does Bossuet always put first "the prayer of simple presence, of contemplation, and of quiet," then "the extraordinary prayers," and then "the passive prayers"?

*A.* Because, as most of the mystics have done, he divides these prayers into three classes. In the first are comprised the prayers of ordinary contemplation, of simple presence and of quiet. In the second class come the prayers extraordinary either in degree, or in character as being accompanied by remarkable gifts, like ecstasies, visions or revelations. Thirdly come prayers purely passive, or proper to a passive state. In treating of these last, Bossuet very aptly points out the mistake of those who confuse contemplation with passive prayer, although the two notions are quite distinct according to St. Thomas and other theologians, who never include passive prayer in their discussion of contemplation.<sup>1</sup> For although contemplation, like faith, does not proceed by reasoning, it nevertheless leaves the power of reasoning, which in the passive state is always taken away.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1. X, § 16. Cf. S. Th. Sum. Theol, II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. LXXXII, A. 3; q. CLXXX.

<sup>2</sup> Or at least rendered almost incapable of being exercised. Bossuet seems to have thus modified the statement of the text, under the pressure of criticisms made by Fénelon and others. Ed.

*Q.* Well, I am now quite satisfied about the questions we have discussed, and I am no longer in dread of the possible abuses of mystical prayer. Indeed, I am going to ask if you will not teach me how to attain, not to the extraordinary or purely passive prayers, but to some humble degree of those which Bossuet and St. Teresa place in the lowest class, namely, the prayer of simple recollection, silence, contemplation, and of repose or quiet.

*A.* Such means as I have learned from the mystics may all be reduced to the cultivation of various remote and proximate dispositions.

*Q.* Will you not describe the remote dispositions?

*A.* They amount simply to one thing, complete purity of soul. In the following dialogues we shall consider this under four headings: purity of conscience, purity of heart, purity of mind, and purity of action.



## FIRST DIALOGUE.

### On Purity of Conscience.

*Q.* In what does purity of conscience consist?

*A.* In a firm disposition of will never to consent deliberately to the slightest offence against God, this disposition being habitual in the sense that any act contrary to it is instantly retracted.

*Q.* Why is this disposition necessary to the prayer of simple recollection?

*A.* When there is question of our acquiring active recollection by the aid of ordinary graces, these graces are more abundant and efficacious in proportion as we are more faithful in wishing to avoid even the slightest sin which can defile the conscience. So, when there is question of infused recollection, we cannot expect this special grace from God, while we possess so little love and filial fear that we dread to offend Him only because the offence would cause us to be damned, and are not prepared to avoid sin merely because it displeases God.

*Q.* How can we acquire this purity of conscience?

*A.* By using all the ordinary means taught by books and directors, but especially by great attention to every interior movement, in order that the con-

tinual sense of our weakness may lead us to have recourse to God in all temptations, as well as to humble ourselves and to repent before God after our slightest sins.

Q Why this continual recourse to God !

A Because, as theologians say, often we have no other power than that of trying, and at the same time praying to obtain further aid. This happens, St. Augustine declares, in order that we may learn both to do the little we can and to ask for help to do more : *facere quod possis et petere quod non possis.*

Q. After a fall what should our repentance be like?

A. It should be neither uneasy nor disturbed, but moderate and peaceful. St. Francis de Sales says : "Even in the depth of our sorrow for sin, there must be peace." For, as God dwells and works only in peace, any anxiety or trouble will deprive us of His sweet presence and cause us to lose strength, so that our soul will become steadily weaker and more languid.

Q. How should we humble ourselves before God for our faults?

A. Our interior humiliation must be free of all chagrin and anger towards self. Immoderate movements will remedy nothing, and are in themselves only new faults, often more dangerous than the first. They come from our piqued self-love and from our

pride, stirred up at seeing our souls still so imperfect. "Put aside," continues St. Francis de Sales, "all this self-humiliation, so uneasy, ill-humored, impatient, and consequently proud. Learn patiently to bear with yourself, as you must bear with your neighbor; and in the same spirit of charity. Practice gentleness toward yourself, as toward others, by chiding yourself without anger, bitterness or contempt." <sup>1</sup>

Q. After a few moments given to this repentance and this peaceful humiliation, what should we do?

A. We should return immediately to God and to our pious exercises with the same confidence as if nothing had happened. This is the great secret of quickly acquiring great purity of conscience, and, at the same time, perfect self-knowledge and true humility of heart; for these are best founded upon frequent experience of our misery and pitiable weakness.

Q. But is it not presumptuous and rash so soon to expect the pardon of our frequent daily faults?

A. Listen to what is said by "The Spiritual Combat," a book universally approved and esteemed especially by St. Francis de Sales: "Yea, shouldst thou chance to fall not a few times but a hundred times a day, and that not through inadvertence but with perfect knowledge, yet never despair, never grow faint-hearted or overfearful of thyself, but still stand upon thy accustomed guard against all assaults, and

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens*, IX.

after having asked pardon and having humiliated thyself once, act with no less confidence a second a third and even a fourth time." <sup>1</sup> Without a moment's delay return to God, to yourself, to your usual occupation and exercises, with the same confidence as if you had not failed. Imitate thus the wise conduct of a traveler, courageous in mind though weak in body. If he happens to fall, he gets up immediately and goes on his way again without losing time or uselessly lamenting. If some steps further along, he falls again, he thinks only of rising as before and of bravely continuing his journey. Thus, in spite of repeated falls, he at last arrives at the end of his journey, though later perhaps than those who have fallen seldom or not at all.

Q. Can you give me some good reason for believing that all this holds good in spiritual affairs?

A. Yes; for since we should and must always return to God, we can never do so too quickly. Besides, does not this promptness show that our great weakness is accompanied by a good will and by a confidence worthy of God? In no one else but in Him could we look for a kindness which would surpass the multitude and enormity of our offences. To hesitate would imply a criminal distrust of the infinite mercy

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps from chapter XXVI of *The Spiritual Combat*, though, in that case, not accurate. Ed.

of God; or a hardness of heart insensible to the misfortune of having displeased God; or a timidity born of a pride that shrinks from confessing its infidelities so often and so promptly; or a love of liberty which, regarding these frequent returns as promises to do better, takes care not to bind nor to pledge itself to anything. And then what happens? We remove ourselves farther and farther from God, we become more and more feeble, we fall more frequently and more heavily, and we make our return more and more difficult.

Oh, if certain apparently spiritual persons well understood the reasons of these prompt returns to God, we would not see them after their falls so discouraged as to be ready even to abandon most of their pious exercises, not daring, as they say, to present themselves before God after such infidelities; and flattering themselves that their feelings come from true sorrow and true humility. Truly spiritual persons have quite different sentiments and pursue an entirely different course of conduct. Deeply moved by their faults which make them realize the burden of their misery and weakness, they are not discouraged, despondent, nor even surprised. They learn thereby to know themselves better, to humble themselves more profoundly before God, and to distrust themselves so completely as to consider their own weakness desparate and God their only hope. In speaking of the

misery of man, Bossuet says that his frailties, by humiliating him, partly cure him. St. Francis de Sales goes even further and says that always to rise, never to be discouraged, never to lose any of our firm resolution to belong entirely to God, is a mark of heroic virtue.

Q. It seems as if what you have just said means that we should rather rejoice than be afflicted at our faults.

A. We must distinguish between faults — always to be regretted — and their consequences which are sometimes fortunate. The Church does so in alluding to the fall of Adam. *O felix culpa!* “O happy fault,” she cries, — happy not in itself but in having merited such a Redeemer,—*Quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem.* Thus likewise let us, in order to correct the mistaken grief and the false humility which follow our falls, immediately revive our courage and our hope at the sight of God, powerful and merciful enough to give us in the midst of our failures, the precious treasure of true humility of heart which is the foundation and guardian of all virtues, and at the same time the precious treasure of total self-distrust and perfect confidence in God alone, the two poles of the spiritual life.

Q. What ordinarily happens when the soul has reached thus far by virtue of thorough self-knowledge and an ever present sense of lowliness before God?



A. God soon advances it further, and causes it to make great progress, by showering upon it His most precious gifts and graces. He runs no risk of this soul's robbing Him of any of His glory by attributing even the least share to itself. Hence one of the most spiritual men of the last century said, "A recognized fault is worth more to us than an angelic virtue appropriated through vain self-complacence." This is the reason why God sometimes leaves in lofty souls very unbecoming faults which serve to develop at one and the same time the humility of these great souls and the faith and charity of the observers.

Q. But how can it be that souls so dear to our Lord still retain such faults without injury to their perfection?

A. Because in them these faults are not, as in the imperfect, cherished, fostered or tolerated, but, on the contrary, are hated, detested and combatted. Therefore, the heart is free of that which most displeases God, namely affection and attachment to sin. There remain, by Divine permission, only the weakness and the frailty of nature so well adapted to keep the noblest souls humble interiorly and often even exteriorly.

Moreover these faults, involuntary in a certain sense, are admirably offset by heroic virtues; and these virtues are always accompanied by the most profound humility aroused at the sight of these same

faults which the soul constantly, though unsuccessfully is trying to correct. This admirable design of God of itself should suffice to make us more cautious in our judgment of persons whose inner life is entirely unknown to us ; for often it is disguised under most deceptive appearances. Indeed, acquaintance with a single example should be enough to prevent rash judgment and indiscreet criticism.

## SECOND DIALOGUE.

### On Purity of Heart.

Q. In what does purity of heart consist and why is it a necessary disposition for the prayer of recollection?

A. It consists in being free not only from all criminal, but even from so-called innocent attachments; since they divide between God and creatures a heart made for God alone, and such a division destroys all hope of success in this kind of prayer. As we have said, this prayer is a sweet repose of mind and heart in God; but if we are accustomed to let thoughts and affections rest on the object of our attachments, what repose can we experience in God, until we have renounced these previous attachments and turned ourselves to God, to repose in Him as once we reposed in the creatures we cherished?

Again this prayer is a tasting of God. But if we relish material things, sensual pleasures, honor, esteem, reputation and the like, how can we taste God until purified of all these sensual tastes which are earthly and human?

This prayer is a look fixed on God. But how can we keep up this look of pure faith through the thick

mist of sensuous ideas and images ; since a single attachment to these suffices to blind mind and imagination?

This prayer is a recollection in God. But how can we recollect our thoughts, our desires and affections in God if a single other object holds them as it were in chains or is constantly enticing them back to captivity?

Finally, this prayer is an interior silence, reverent, admiring and loving. But how can we enter into and abide in this deep silence during the noise and clamor of a thousand raging desires, a swarm of restless hopes and fears, crowded into a heart always troubled, and always sighing for everything except God?

Q. But if this prayer requires so much purity and detachment of heart, it is then the prayer of perfect souls. Others cannot hope for it.

A. Detachment of heart, or, what is the same thing, purity of heart, like this prayer, has several degrees. Perfect detachment of heart begets a great facility for entering into this prayer ; imperfect detachment begets a lesser facility.

Q. Will you give an illustration of this principle?

A. Willingly. Those who, by purifying their hearts from the least attachments, come to love God alone or all things for God's sake, enter into this prayer of pure love as naturally as a fish dives into the water, its native element ; those who have less love enter it less readily.

*Q.* It seems to me that on this subject I have read some other illustrations, made by St. Francis de Sales, and based on a comparison with earthly love. Could you not make use of the words of this great saint to explain your thoughts more clearly and more fully?

*A.* Yes. Imagine an earthly lover, entirely taken up with the loveliness that he idolizes. Does he not find in this occupation a sweet repose of heart, a delicious pleasure, a fascination which, absorbing all the powers of his soul lets him think only of his idol? How steadily the inner gaze is fixed upon the idol of his heart! Sometimes he falls into an inner silence so profound that it replaces all other sentiments and leaves room only for the transports of his love. Well all this is a fair enough image of what occurs during the holy recollection and sweet repose of a detached soul completely fascinated by divine love.

But here is something surprising. When speaking of a heart possessed by earthly love, we easily comprehend all its dispositions and understand even those mystical terms which I have purposely employed. Why then, when there is question of a heart given over to the holy impressions of divine love, do its interior dispositions during this prayer of simple presence become incomprehensible; and those very same terms seem too mystical? And incomprehensible to whom? Shall I say? To persons who wish to be considered spiritual.

Let me here, with all due respect to these persons and to their office, ask if they imagine that this love, stronger than death and hell, has entirely lost its old power and its traditional sway ; or that today there are no longer any hearts capable of experiencing it ; or that because its operations are less visible and palpable than those of earthly love, they are therefore less real and true. Let them remember Bossuet's words : "During these purely spiritual operations, the soul, although it seems to vanish and disappear into itself, is exercising to the full its truest and most natural operations." <sup>1</sup> Let them listen to Mother de Chantal who teaches that the more profound, delicate, and almost imperceptible these divine operations become, the more perfect they are, as being then more spiritual and less sensual. Or let them listen to the venerable Father Louis Lallemant, who tells us that in operations of this sort the perceptible element is, as it were ; only the outward sign of grace.

Q. But if the degree of ease with which we enter into this prayer usually corresponds with the degree of our purity of heart, what is to be done by those who have no such purity at all ?

A. To possess at least some small degree of it is indispensable.

Q. In what does the least and lowest degree of purity or detachment consist ?

<sup>1</sup> 1. V, § 19.



A. In a sincere desire to acquire it ; in an earnest purpose to take every means of obtaining it ; and particularly in practising this prayer to whatever extent we can during our meditations or meditative readings.

Q. How can we do this?

A. By occasionally substituting for reading the practice of the presence of God, as the Bishop of Meaux teaches,<sup>1</sup> and as will be explained more in detail later on. For because of our good will, — with which God is satisfied in those who, for the time being, can do no more, — it often happens that during meditation or similar customary exercises, God makes Himself momentarily felt and tasted by passing touches of this holy recollection ; and thenceforward all detachment begins to be easy.

Q. How does that happen?

A. Well our heart is really made for God ; and, after we have once tasted Him, even if only for a moment, everything else seems insipid. This little taste of God by the heart leaves a charm which makes us turn toward God almost as a needle touched with a magnet turns toward iron. "God," says St. Augustine, "performs the miracle of infusing into a well disposed soul, a heavenly delight which surpasses all earthly pleasures and gives us the strength to spurn them." Now this beginning of purity or detachment in a heart gives it, in turn, a new attraction or inclination to

<sup>1</sup> 1. VII, § 10.

holy recollection in prayer. And then comes rapid progress in purity of heart, which facilitates holy recollection, and in holy recollection, which facilitates purity and detachment.

*Q.* Are there any good examples of what you say?

*A.* I remember having heard it said by various directors that they had long sighed in secret over the slow progress of certain souls, who later on when God caused His presence to be felt through some passing touches of this divine recollection, became very easy to direct, and advanced so steadily that they seemed to have been transformed into new beings. St. Jane de Chantal, while still in the world, gave a beautiful instance of this. After having spoken about the exchange of her former director for the holy Bishop of Geneva,—who knew her inclination before she approached him, and who advised her to follow it,—she continues: “It seemed as if at that instant a complete and blessed revolution suddenly took place within me.”<sup>1</sup>

*Q.* Do the received authors agree as to the astonishing efficacy of this prayer?

*A.* St. John of the Cross declares it expressly in a hundred places, and implies it throughout all his works. The venerable Father Louis Lallemant and his two illustrious disciples, Father Rigoleuc and

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Sainte Chantal*, par M. de Maupas, pt. I, ch. 15.

Father Surin, in their spiritual letters, speak of persons who, by the aid of simple touches of this prayer, advanced further in a month than they had previously done in ten or fifteen years.

### THIRD DIALOGUE.

#### On Purity of Mind.

*Q.* In what does purity of mind consist?

*A.* In overcoming the false independence which naturally inclines us to think of what pleases us so long as it seems not to be evil; or at least in possessing enough self-restraint to keep our minds from constantly running about after the vain images of material things, as children run after butterflies.

*Q.* Why is this kind of purity necessary to the prayer of recollection?

*A.* Because if the mind is accustomed to wander continually among these idle thoughts, it cannot enter into itself at the time of prayer; and above all, it cannot practice that kind of prayer called "simple recollection" which naturally requires great recollection of mind. Moreover, if our mind is always roving about amid all sorts of agreeable or amusing objects, how can we withdraw our inner sight from these things and fix it on the incomprehensible objects of faith? Even if we could do so for a moment or two, these vain ideas and pleasing images would be continually trying to re-instate themselves in the imagination, like the clouds of dust around a traveler that keep him

from seeing where he is and whither he is going. We must, therefore, resist the natural wanderings of the mind and continually restrain the natural activity of the soul by not permitting it to entertain itself with, nor even voluntarily to wander among, vain, frivolous or useless thoughts. We must look upon all these just as if they were really wicked ; and we must act as if they were so, the moment we discover them.

*Q.* This kind of purity seems to me the most difficult of all.

*A.* So it really is, but take notice : when once we have experienced a first taste of God and this sweet peace of His, we feel ourselves constantly called back again by the sweet remembrance of this taste which makes us involuntarily forget everything else. And as this same attraction tends little by little to give us a disgust for creatures, we finally come to advert to them only, as it were, with reluctance. Then we enjoy mental liberty because we no longer willingly attend to anything but God and heavenly things.

*Q.* But what must we do to reach this happy state?

*A.* By studying recollection, we must labor to destroy or at least to weaken our unfortunate attachments ; for these give rise to the thoughts which are most alluring and hardest to dismiss. Accordingly as they are weakened, we feel less pain in withdrawing mind and thought from what we have already com-

menced to forsake in heart and affection. Now since it is only because of the pleasure and the vain joys experienced by the heart that the mind attaches itself to and fixes its gaze on agreeable objects, we must, for the time being, shun purely natural pleasures as if they were criminal. Hence we must withdraw the heart from every least joy, be it a piece of good news or of good fortune; so that we may be able to fix it upon its true object which is God. Thus, little by little, we shall accustom ourselves to rejoice and to take pleasure only in God. We must act in the same way and for the same reason with regard to other powerful, purely human emotions, such as hope, fear, annoyance and affection; lest our mind should be altogether taken up with these.

Q. What is to be done with other less attractive thoughts which are merely useless or frivolous?

A. We must drop them out of the mind as we would drop a stone from the hand. If through inadvertence, we ever allow ourselves to be amused by them, we must, as soon as this is discovered, recall the wandering mind, either by a simple remembrance of God, or by a brief elevation of the heart to Him, or by the help of a good thought prepared in advance and ready for use when needed.

Q. Of course you do not class as useless either reflection upon present necessities, or wise forethought for the future, or holy considerations about ourselves and our spiritual advancement?



A. Who has ever dared to say or even to think that these are useless? But do you wish to know one of the most artful ruses of self-love, so jealous of preserving that freedom of thought which forms its nourishment and its life? Do you wish to know a very subtle illusion caused by the natural activity of the mind which, only by the aid of painful and almost continual self-denial, can restrain its thoughts and reflections within the bounds of strict necessity? If so, let us discuss together the four points just mentioned by you.

1. Under pretence that we must think of what we are going to do or say, so many useless and superfluous thoughts and reflections come to us that often the very time we lose in deliberating and considering unimportant things would be enough for the execution of them. And as for the more important things, — each of which demands its own share of time, although we try to think of all at the same moment, — they often cause in the soul a confusion of thoughts and reflections, which so agitates, disquiets and disturbs the whole interior and so overwhelms the mind, that we can no longer think either of God, or of ourselves, or even of what we should be doing.

2. Under pretence of providing for the future, and, as we say, of not tempting Providence, we spend much time in heaping thought upon thought, reflection upon reflection, plan upon plan ; we exhaust ourselves

with uneasy forebodings, with anxious fears, and often with useless precautions; but when the time comes, appearances change, or we alter our ideas and opinions; and then we begin to take new measures, often just the contrary of those so uselessly thought out and so vainly resolved upon previously.

3. Under pretence of what we call examination or holy introspection, we discuss certain affairs and hold certain conversations. Every trifling circumstance of time, place, person and speech is recalled, and is followed immediately by a new crowd of reflections worse than useless, since generally they serve only to create vain joys, vain fears, or still vainer hopes. All these in turn tend only to augment our natural dissipation of mind and to destroy our interior peace, by carrying uneasiness and anxiety into the very depths of the soul.

4. Finally, under pretence of spiritual advancement, we vainly and almost incessantly employ ourselves in continually, or at any rate unseasonably, recalling the heavenly blessings and graces received, and our courageous oblation of all actions and suffering past and present; and still more in amusing ourselves with a thousand good and holy plans for the future, at the expense of the present. All the above are thoughts which interior self-denial and true mortification should continually suppress, in conformity with Article XVII of Issy. This article

expressly states: "All reflection upon our own actions and the gifts of God, adapted to nourish self-love, to obtain human comfort or to direct excessive attention to self, is not only useless but evil and dangerous." These too, are the very thoughts condemned by really spiritual men and by those holy mystics, whose words are very often sadly misunderstood through prejudice, or else, — let me say it plainly, — through lack of the requisite intelligence or attention.

Q. But by what means shall we restrain the mind's natural activity within the narrow bounds of this cruel and almost inhuman captivity? How shall we bring ourselves to the constant renunciation of this dearest delight of self-love, this delightful freedom to entertain ourselves at will with our own thoughts, and to comfort ourselves with pleasant or amusing reflections?

A. The means is to say to oneself on these occasions: "Such and such things have occurred. What is the use of worrying about them now? As to what should be done or said in the future, that can be considered at the proper time. God will provide for everything. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Will not to-morrow and the following days bring with them their own graces? Let me think then, only of the present as God Himself bids us do. Let me leave the past to His mercy and the future to His providence; and meanwhile, let me labor peacefully

and quietly for my salvation first, and for other things later on. As to the outcome, let me leave it to God, casting all my cares upon His paternal bosom, in the belief that He, as St. Peter says, 'hath care of us.' ”<sup>1</sup>

With simple confidence and abandonment,—much better adapted than the greatest solicitude is, to provide for and remedy everything, — we should say to God: “Lord, without wishing to neglect anything which You prescribe for the good of my soul or body, I hope that at the proper time and place, You will give me the thought, the impulse, and the ability to undertake and perform such and such affairs, which keep coming into my mind, so often and so unseasonably. I abandon them and their outcome to You, in order that I may more fully devote myself to You; that I may wait patiently and with perfect resignation, until all things happen as Your wise providence ordains.”

In consequence of this holy preparation of mind and heart and of all the sacrifices it includes, this loving Providence, always attentive to the characteristics and the needs of fervent souls, disposes to their advantage the most trifling occurrences, which are accidental only in appearance, and arranges for the success of their slightest undertakings; and after frequent experience of this happy and divine pro-

<sup>1</sup> Ep. Peter V, 7.

vision, these souls grow steadily in confidence and abandonment. Happy then, are those persons who, in order to be more recollected in God and better disposed to prayer, constantly banish all useless matters from their minds, and retain only what is strictly necessary, — a small amount indeed, since the present quickly passes and the future either will be different from what we expect, or perhaps will never even come at all.

#### FOURTH DIALOGUE.

##### On Purity of Action.

Q. In what does purity of action consist?

A. It consists in the purity of the motives which prompt our actions. Generally speaking these motives may be reduced to acting only for the love of God or only by the command of God. Without this purity, all our conduct will be infected by sin, imperfection, and vanity.

Q. Why is this purity necessary in order to enter into holy recollection?

A. Because this divine recollection, since it unites us very specially with the all-pure God, requires in the soul a degree of purity proportionate to the degree of union.

Q. How is this kind of purity acquired?

A. It is acquired principally by means of the three other kinds of which we have already spoken; for in the measure that we are careful to avoid all that displeases God by defiling the conscience, and all that deprives God of our love by diverting it toward creatures, and all that excludes God from the mind by occupying it with other thoughts, in the same measure we become disposed to act always in God's sight and

for the sake of God alone. Again, it is acquired by careful attention at the beginning of our actions and especially during the performance of them.

*Q.* Why is this attention necessary at the beginning of our actions?

*A.* Because, if these actions are agreeable, useful and in accord with natural inclination, we begin them instinctively and quickly, being moved either by pleasure or by interest. Now think what careful attention and what self-control are needed in order to prevent our will from being instantly carried away by the influence of natural motives which flatter, coax and charm it!

*Q.* Why do you insist that this attention is necessary especially during the performance of our actions?

*A.* Because even though at first we may have had the strength to renounce all the flattering attractions of the senses and of self-love, and to act entirely on simple faith by means of a pure intention, it is still necessary to watch ourselves closely. For as the pleasure experienced or the interest aroused during the course of certain actions begins to affect us, the heart succumbs to these influences; nature, although mortified by our first renunciation, revives and resumes its ascendancy; and soon self-love, subtly and almost imperceptibly, substitutes its own selfish aim for the original good motives of our actions. Hence there often takes place what St. Paul<sup>1</sup> alludes to:

<sup>1</sup> Gal. III, 3.



whereas we began in the spirit, we would be made perfect by the flesh,—that is to say, the invasion of low, earthly, sensual, ambitions and selfish aims destroys all the purity and merit of a vast number of deeds of piety, charity, zeal, justice, love of order, common good and general utility. And this occurs even in the fulfilment of the most sacred duties.

Q. How can we acquire a perfect degree of this purity?

A. By striving to act in everything with the sole intention of pleasing God, that is, with the single motive of pure love,—without, however, positively excluding other lower motives. True disinterestedness elevates our actions so much that with it the humblest of them gains more merit before God than a hundred grander deeds would gain without it. Bossuet, like all theologians, declares that since charity is the source of merit in all free acts, he who has greater charity, gains greater merit, whether he labors more or less.<sup>1</sup> And he adds that all the merit of our actions depends upon the degree of our charity, a thing known to God alone.

Hence it matters not that we work little and achieve little, that we live in very narrow spheres, or in conditions where we have no chance of doing anything humanly great. Despite all this, if we act through motives of charity, we can acquire more

<sup>1</sup> 1. IX, § 13.

holiness on earth and more glory in heaven than persons in exalted positions, who, though they accomplish splendid deeds, are not actuated by motives of charity, or, as we say, by pure love. This is a principle which should console the weak and lowly, and humiliate the great; though the great too, should take heart since, if they wish, they likewise can act from motives of pure love.

*Q.* What kind of impurity of action is most to be feared, especially by spiritual persons?

*A.* Vanity, whether exterior or interior.

*Q.* In what does exterior vanity exist?

*A.* In an immoderate desire for the vain esteem of men.

*Q.* How does this desire corrupt our actions?

*A.* By making us readily advert to what people are going to say, and to what will be thought of us by such and such persons whose esteem and approval we prize highly. This happens because we are excessively fond of a certain notoriety which, unless renounced once for all, will be, as St. Teresa says, like a worm at the root of a plant, gnawing it imperceptibly but causing it to wither and its fruit and leaves to fall.<sup>1</sup> When, on the contrary, we trample under foot everything like honor, reputation, esteem and human praise, we have attained according to the approved teachers, to one of the highest degrees of the spiritual life, where, detached from all that we hold

<sup>1</sup> Autobiography, ch. XXXI.

dearest in the world, we become united to God alone, and are contented to please Him alone, and enjoy Him alone, not only during prayer but at all times and in all places.

*Q.* Is interior vanity also to be feared?

*A.* Yes; and even more than external vanity since, while equally fatal, it is less perceptible.

*Q.* In what does it consist?

*A.* In a vain self-esteem which makes us prefer ourselves to others; in a tendency to keep measuring ourselves and continually comparing ourselves with others. Hence come haughtiness, pride, scorn, disdain, envy, jealousy and a hundred other disorders. It consists again, in depending much more upon our own knowledge, resolution and energy than upon the grace of God, and in relying upon our own moral integrity and supposed merit rather than upon God's pure mercy, — and this may be the actual state of things although very often we are saying and believing the contrary. Finally, it consists in a constant, secret, vain complacency, which, unless we are careful, makes us draw continual satisfaction from all that we undertake for God, and for our salvation and perfection. Now is there anything so apt to stifle the spirit of recollection as all this pride and vanity? Evidently not; and we have already suggested the reason, by showing that of all kinds of prayer, this humiliates us the most and most imperatively demands the exercise of humility and diffidence.

Q. Why is this kind of prayer the most humiliating?

A. Well, in other prayers we speak to God and to self; we reflect; we reason; and we are distinctly conscious of co-operating with grace. All this keeps our mind and will alive, gratifies us, and causes us an interior satisfaction which, though holy in itself, made St. Francis de Sales exclaim, that the wretched things which satisfy us do not satisfy God.<sup>1</sup>

In the kind of prayer we are considering, on the contrary, the mind, the will and all the faculties are hindered in the exercise of their proper and customary operations. Nothing takes place but simple direct acts so indistinctly perceived that our main fear is lest we may be idling away our time. Hence, instead of complacency, we experience during or after this kind of prayer, the strongest temptations to give it up. I may appeal to the testimony of all directors who find it so hard to remove this temptation from souls that have an undoubted call to this kind of prayer. How much trouble St. Francis de Sales had in calming Mother de Chantal's fears! And how her holy soul was attacked over and over again by the same fears, the same trials and temptations!

Q. But is all this equally true in cases where our recollection is both evident and pleasant?

A. Yes it is; for even in such cases as you mention, our actions are as indistinct and as obscure as

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens*, II.

in the others. Moreover, the most pleasant and the most evident phenomena that then occur are so clearly a gift that, as St. Teresa says, we recognize perfectly well our own inability to produce them.<sup>1</sup> So, although we may rejoice, as beggars do who have received alms, we are in no sense entitled to boast. Those who are long familiar with this kind of prayer, realizing how little comes from themselves and how much from God, claim almost no credit for what they do or say or think. They attribute all to God; and they do so by a simple movement of the heart, preceding all reflection and springing from a deep, habitual conviction of their own utter inability to do good.

Q. Whence comes such a conviction to these souls?

A. Bossuet<sup>2</sup> has already told us: "It comes from their inner experience of the truth of these words: *'Without Me you can do nothing.'*"<sup>3</sup>

Q. It is then a great error to oppose or reject this method of prayer through fear of becoming vain?

A. Yes, and this error proceeds from the supposition that in ordinary recollection, we experience all those things which happen occasionally in extraordinary passive prayer, viz.: ecstasies, raptures, interior whispers, visions, revelations, clear and

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, ch. XIV.

<sup>2</sup> 1. VII, § 16.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. XV, 5.

sublime knowledge of the Trinity, understanding of all the mysteries of the faith and the like. It must be well understood that instead of this, we usually experience only darkness, suffering, confusion and interior humiliations.<sup>1</sup> Consequently we have need of great patience, entire resignation and perfect abandonment, as may be learned from a letter of Mother de Chantal to a superior of her order.<sup>2</sup> Now if people realized all this, they might perhaps fear this prayer much more than they do, but they would fear it for very different reasons.

*Q.* Are there not certain authors who, in speaking of simple recollection, of ordinary contemplation, or of ordinary passive prayer, present such lofty notions of them that some readers are dazzled and others are discouraged from aspiring to contemplation?

*A.* Ah, but how different it is in practice! Recall the most sublime things said by the Bishop of Meaux regarding contemplation and you will perceive that practically they all reduce to this: peace and silence are reigning in the school of the heart; the senses see nothing and comprehend nothing; the soul, plunged in the obscurity of faith, seems to be like an animal with neither intellect nor speech.<sup>3</sup> Do you find in this practical annihilation anything likely to flatter human pride?

<sup>1</sup> 1. VIII, § 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettres*, 1, III, Ep. 37.

<sup>3</sup> 1. V, § 22. Cf. Ps. LXXII, 23.

Q. Certain authors deceive us then, when they say that we must always dread the illusions of pride and vanity?

A. This advice is wisely enough given, but for the most part it is very badly understood.

Q. Then how should it be understood?

A. Thus: we must always take good care lest our pride and our dazzled self-love should make us seek, request, or even desire the least gift of this prayer through a vain desire of self-exaltation. For the devil, using this proud disposition, might, by all sorts of illusions, make us, like many others, find in these prayers not what is truly there but rather that which we have sought through vanity. So we should find not what would produce true greatness of soul by lowering and debasing us in our own eyes, but what would inflate our mind and heart and cause a false exaltation which is a real abomination in God's sight.

Therefore, let us never forget that when mystics treat of these lofty and sublime prayers, they speak always in the divine sense and not in the human sense as vain and ignorant men suppose. St. Paul has in mind this same divine sense when he speaks so nobly of the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> For what is this sublime and excellent knowledge for the sake of which he has renounced all things and counts them as loss, if it is not love of the cross, and fellowship in the sufferings of Christ to the extent of reproducing

<sup>1</sup> Philipp. III, 8.



the crucifixion over again in his person? "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." <sup>1</sup> Do you find in this anything apt to flatter vanity and to nourish self-love?

*Q.* And now, why did you say that this method of prayer requires souls to be humble and diffident?

*A.* Because souls without these characteristics cannot even understand this prayer. Even scholars, if they have not personally experienced it, cannot judge concerning it unless they are humble, — as Bossuet says in his Preface. <sup>2</sup> This reminds me of having heard it said at Paris by a learned theologian, one of the best known in France, that he had often read but never understood St. Teresa's description of the various degrees of prayer. Such sublimities are better fitted to confound than to flatter pride, since even to understand them requires a certain lowliness of mind and a distrust of one's self and of one's own knowledge and learning. All this seems to be referred to in those words of Jesus Christ: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones." <sup>3</sup>

*Q.* Why, when speaking of remote dispositions, did you say nothing about external mortification?

<sup>1</sup> Philipp. III, 10.

<sup>2</sup> § 6.

<sup>3</sup> Lk. X, 21.

A. Because nobody is ignorant of its usefulness. Every spiritual book mentions it and every preacher counsels it. By universal consent, it is regarded as a help to all kinds of prayer. Besides, of what use is this mortification, if not from the heart, and if not purified of secret complacency, of pride, of presumption and of vain self-esteem? How often do we find under a mortified exterior an unchristian mind given up to hasty desires and most disorderly passions! This could not happen if persons relied mainly upon interior self-denial, which is the true source of all sanctity.

Now what a high degree of this self-denial is attained by means of the four kinds of purity that have just been spoken of! They leave nothing unmortified; they sacrifice every action, intention, desire and thought. They render senses, mind, heart and the whole nature incapable of finding satisfaction in any vanity whatsoever. Consequently, they destroy all the passions in the heart, so that the enemy finds there no hold for his temptations or his delusions, both of which feed upon the roots of pride and self-love and live upon the smallest growths of the accursed seed of Adam.

Q. But at least, why did you not speak of interior peace which is said to be the foundation of prayer and of the entire spiritual life?

A. I admit that we can never build anything solid except on this foundation, since on the one hand

God lives and acts only in peace, and on the other hand, lack of peace is to the soul what lack of health is to the body. As disease, by weakening bodily strength makes us unable to apply ourselves to work, so also, whatever troubles or alters the peace of the soul, makes it weak, faint and incapable of exercising its functions. This is why St. Francis de Sales so often repeats that trouble, disquietude, sadness and grief are real diseases of the mind and very hurtful to the soul.

I admit all this ; but note that if I have not spoken directly of this peace, I have perhaps done even better by teaching four infallible means of obtaining it. And by these four means, it will be obtained so thoroughly that it can be disturbed neither by uneasy remorse which springs from impurity of conscience ; nor by violent attachments which come from impurity in a heart made for God alone, and violently fastening itself to creatures ; nor by the tyranny of passions, since their prime origin is in the impurity of a mind given over to wandering thoughts ; nor, finally, by the desire of pleasing men, or the vain fear of displeasing them, since both these come only from the impure motives of such actions as have not God alone in view.

Q. Will you now tell me what are the proximate dispositions for recollection ?

A. Generally speaking, they consist in being

careful about our ordinary prayers, for it is absolutely impossible to attain to the prayer of recollection unless we pray.

*Q.* But what kind of prayer must we use in order to arrive at recollection?

*A.* Whatever kind we have chosen, either through inclination or by the suggestion of our director. It is a fixed principle that no man should give up his ordinary method of prayer for another method unless he experiences a new attraction inviting him to make this change.

*Q.* You are speaking, then, only to persons who practice prayer regularly?

*A.* Yes, or at least, only to those who are determined to apply themselves to it steadily.

*Q.* How should these two classes of persons use their customary method of prayer in order to prepare themselves for the prayer of recollection?

*A.* They should observe the two rules which are to be discussed in the next dialogue.

## FIFTH DIALOGUE.

### On the Proximate Dispositions for Recollection, or on the Observance of Two Rules.

*Q.* What is the first rule?

*A.* It is to proceed quietly and slowly, word by word, whether praying vocally or mentally.

*Q.* What is the second rule?

*A.* It is occasionally to interrupt our meditation by the practising of the presence of God, — as Bossuet puts it, following Father Baltasar.<sup>1</sup> Others make the second rule consist in the interrupting of our meditation by attentive pauses, as if, after having spoken to God, we were then to listen to Him.

*Q.* Why is the first rule necessary?

*A.* In order to avoid all effort and straining of the mind, these being unfavorable to prayer. For it is an accepted maxim that a prayer which makes the head ache is of little use; since prayer is much less the work of the head than the work of the heart, and of a heart which speaks with filial confidence to Him whom our Lord tells us to call "Father".

*Q.* But if we must pray so slowly and so quietly, how shall we ever become fervent?

<sup>1</sup> 1. VII, § 10. Cf. *Vie du P. Baltasar Alvarez*, ch. XIII.

A. What we call fervor is often nothing but a heating of the blood and a warming of the imagination, or, at any rate, a mere natural activity apt to impede the operations of the Holy Spirit, since it disturbs that interior peace in the absence of which He usually influences us but very little.

Q. Are there any examples in Scripture to illustrate what you say?

A. There are many; and I will cite two for you. The first is that of the prophet Eliseus who, before praying, decided that he must calm the agitation of his soul a little too deeply affected by his pious zeal for the glory of God.<sup>1</sup> The second is that of Elias whom God commanded to approach and listen to Him upon the mountain. How did God make Himself heard? In a mighty wind? In an earthquake? In a blazing fire? Not at all. Mark the account given by Holy Scripture: "Behold a great and strong wind overthrowing the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces; and the Lord is not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; and the Lord is not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire; and the Lord is not in the fire. And after fire, the blowing of a gentle air. And when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle, and coming forth, stood in the entrance of the cave; and behold a voice."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IV. Kings III, 15.

<sup>2</sup> III Kings XIX, 11.

Why is this God's way with men? Because all violence, by disturbing the quiet of the soul, stifles the peaceful spirit of God, or, at least, prevents us from feeling its sweet impressions, — just as after throwing little pebbles into a quiet pool, we can no longer perceive the faint breeze which has been barely ruffling the surface of the water.

*Q.* And now, in the second place, why should we occasionally interrupt our meditation with attentive pauses?

*A.* In order that after having spoken to God, we may listen to Him in silence, so that He, in His turn, may speak to us; for prayer is really nothing but a dialogue or conversation with God.

*Q.* How does God speak to us?

*A.* In many ways. Sometimes He speaks by visions, by revelations, or by interior words heard, according to St. Teresa, in the depths of the soul as plainly as if they were pronounced exteriorly, — but we do not refer to those things now, since we are discussing only simple ordinary recollection.

God speaks also by lights and inspirations. Hence, in order to become more attentive, we must stop our reasoning from time to time.

Again God speaks by acting; for with God, to speak or to do are the same thing. *Ipse dixit et facta sunt*, — He spoke and all things were made, says Holy Scripture.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary, then, to stop some-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. XXXII, 9.



times, in order to admit the impressions He sends to the heart which is moved, swayed, directed and shaped as He pleases. He does all this in a way that is quite incomprehensible ; but, provided that the impurities of our souls cause no obstacle, it is all done much more easily than the most skilful hand could mould a piece of soft beeswax.

Again, God speaks by granting what we ask of Him, — as the rich man speaks and responds to the poor man by simply giving him alms. We must, therefore, imitate the poor man who, instead of crying and moaning incessantly, stops from time to time in order to extend an open hand and receive the alms. In the same way we have to stop at intervals and cease our cries ; for our confidence and our longing must be allowed to dilate our hearts so that God may abundantly pour into us the graces which we firmly hope for and patiently await.

Q. During these intervals devoted to interior silence and to attentive pauses, what does the soul itself do?

A. It stops reasonings and reflections by a voluntary act ; and by the same act, it holds itself in this attentive silence. Thus it resembles a man who expects to hear a beautiful symphony ; as far as possible, he arrests and suspends all other reflections and sense movements, in order to prepare himself to listen silently and to attend better to what he is so eager to hear.

*Q.* How long should these attentive pauses last?

*A.* A longer or shorter time according to the different conditions of our souls. For beginners who have acquired no facility of keeping themselves peacefully and silently in the presence of God, these pauses must be short. Later on, they gradually become easier and consequently may be continued longer, — either in virtue of acquired dispositions or because of an incipient inclination toward recollection. In general, we should remain in silence and solitude as long as we actually feel within us any good disposition of mind or heart toward God.

*Q.* Can you give me some idea of these good dispositions with reference to the different kinds of prayer?

*A.* For persons who pray vocally with the requisite attention, who meditate, or who practise meditative readings, these dispositions sometimes consist of pious sentiments, such as fear, love, sorrow for the past, and desire of amendment. Now if we have these dispositions, what is to hinder us from giving ourselves up to them and remaining in them until they penetrate our inmost souls; or rather until they are graven upon us by the Holy Spirit who is named by the Church "*Digitus Paternae dexteræ*"? When a new stimulus is needed, we may use the same reflections as before; and so, likewise, a second and a third time, always trying to preserve as long as possible the simple but

salutary impressions and good dispositions which constitute recollection.

Q. What are the good dispositions of those whose prayer is made up entirely of affections?

A. Sometimes these dispositions consist of a certain tasting of God, a desire of union with God, a simple tendency of the heart toward God, a deep calm within the soul or a pleasing and unaccustomed peace. All this, say the mystics, shows that God is speaking in His own way; that He is producing both peace and love in the inner recesses of the heart. Now, what is there to prevent us from remaining in peace, in silence, in pure abandonment before God, like the statue, of which St. Francis speaks,<sup>1</sup> or like a well-stretched canvas before the artist, to use the expression of St. John of the Cross? This is how we should be, — not disturbing ourselves, nor moving interiorly, but refraining from our customary actions, contented to remain quiet, and surrendering ourselves utterly into the hands of God.

Q. But are there not people who are scandalized by this doctrine and especially by the comparisons mentioned?

A. None but those who, never having reflected upon what takes place within their own souls, perceive only sensible and palpable acts which can be counted like the beads of a rosary. Such persons, of

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, ch. 11.

course, have never learned Bossuet's exact definition of the Quietists, namely, "Those who, by a total cessation of acts, abuse the holy repose of prayer."<sup>1</sup> Now while we are in any one of the dispositions just spoken of, there cannot be within us this total cessation of acts, this pure idleness of the Quietists. The dispositions mentioned are precisely the same as those simple and direct acts so highly praised by the Bishop of Meaux who treats of them at length as one of the least known but yet most important points in the matter of prayer and spirituality.

*Q.* But may we not be deceived in believing ourselves to be actually in these holy dispositions of mind and of heart?

*A.* Undoubtedly we may; just as with regard to the necessary dispositions for receiving the sacraments. That is why, in both cases, we must be cautious and above all must consult our director.

*Q.* Have directors any definite rule in this matter?

*A.* More so in this perhaps, than in any other. our Lord Himself has given a rule in these short words: "By their fruits, you shall know them."<sup>2</sup> Therefore all prayer which makes us holy, or better, or less wicked is surely good, since it is a means of sanctification. If it produces none of these good

<sup>1</sup> 1. X, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. VII, 20.

effects, it is questionable. If it produces the contrary effect, as in the Quietists, it is then an abomination.

*Q.* If, after having faithfully tried to practice these attentive pauses, I do not find in myself any of the dispositions indicated, should I, on that account, abandon the practice of these pauses?

*A.* Not at all. Do then what Scripture says. "Wait on God with patience."<sup>1</sup> Do as King David who said on a similar occasion: "With expectation, I have waited for the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Do as the man in the parable who, at midnight, awakens his friend to ask for three loaves of bread. At first he is refused and he waits in vain; but at last, his importunate cries and his repeated knockings obtain what he has so long sought fruitlessly.<sup>3</sup> Finally, imitate those poor people who, although fatigued and weary with having waited so often to no purpose, at the door of the rich, continually return in the hope of a favorable answer. By new lamentations and repeated waitings, they at last obtain what has been refused to others, less courageous in practising patience.

*Q.* But if, after having persevered for a long time in the practice of these attentive pauses, I experience nothing of what you have related, have I not wasted a great deal of time?

<sup>1</sup> Eccli. II, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. XXXIX, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Lk. XI, 5 sqq.

A. Not so ; for, in the first place, these pauses always imply that activity has preceded, since they consist simply in ceasing from our own action in order to listen to God. In the second place, just as God sees the criminal intention of a murderer who waits whole hours to strike his blow, so too, He sees the good intention of your attentive pauses and He will be more prompt and more generous in rewarding you than in punishing that other. Moreover, your good intention, during these intervals, is not merely a single good act but a series of most excellent acts.

Q. Can you point out some of these acts?

A. First, there is an act of faith in the presence, the power and the mercy of God ; for you would not be able to remain in attentive silence, if you were not interiorly convinced that the omnipresent God sees everything that takes place within your soul and is, moreover, powerful enough and good enough to assist you. Here then, is an act of practical faith.

Next there is an act of desire and of hope since men await only what they desire and hope for. Now, desire is of the essence of prayer and hope is what makes prayer efficacious.

Again, there is an act of extreme self-distrust and of great confidence in God ; for, during these intervals, you cease your ordinary operations simply because you rely very little upon your own and very much upon God's operations.

In the next place, there is an act of profound humility; for, following the example of the Royal Prophet, you wish to remain at intervals in the presence of God without discourse or reasoning, as if you were "a beast of burden,"<sup>1</sup> and as if you considered silence more becoming than words in the presence of God's supreme Majesty.

Lastly, there is an act of resignation and of abandonment, since you wait in silence, willing to be heard or refused, as it pleases God, before whom you wish to remain unmoved, despite all the distraction and the dryness which so often render these pauses very tiresome and very painful.

Q. But what if, during these intervals, I do not and cannot think of all this?

A. No matter; you are really practising it, since it is all implied in your attempt to make attentive pauses.

Q. Can you render that clearer to me by a practical comparison?

A. Here is one. When a sinner commits a crime, his intention is simply to satisfy his passion. Ordinarily, he never even thinks of his disobedience, of his rebellion against God, of his ingratitude to God, and of his contempt for the promises, the threats and even the Precious Blood of God. Nevertheless, spiritual books and teachers charge and reproach him

<sup>1</sup> Ps. LXXII, 23.



with all these and with many other transgressions; because, as theology says, since they are all involved in his wilful sin, he is presumed effectually and practically to have committed them all. So it is with the various acts contained and involved in your intention of making attentive, voluntary, wistful, humble and submissive pauses.

*Q.* Is there any other advantage in these attentive pauses?

*A.* In my opinion, one of the greatest advantages is this, that, if we continue in the good dispositions acquired by the practice of these four kinds of purity, and in the fervent acts implied in these frequent pauses, we are then all ready to enter into holy recollection the instant God sees fit to open the door.

*Q.* But did you not say that it is not for us to change our ordinary manner of prayer, and that we must wait for God to call us?

*A.* Yes; and those of whom I speak never take it upon themselves to leave the method of prayer in which God and their directors have placed them. If at intervals, they interrupt their reasoning, it is only in order that they may await the moment of the divine attraction, and that they may be better disposed to feel it and the more prepared to give themselves up to it, should God send it. Now this is what I call being "all ready to enter into recollection." Not only is such a condition free from rashness and presumption,

but it helps us along very considerably by dispensing with long and difficult processes of reasoning. And surely I may consider myself called to this simplicity in prayer, if, on the one hand, God Himself leads me into it and if, on the other hand, I have done only what the poor do at the door of the rich, where, after having knocked, wept and groaned with all their might, they patiently wait for an alms and take just what is given to them.

Q. What is the usual result of all this?

A. Something very consoling for persons who practise prayer regularly and in the manner explained. First of all, many good souls who are unconsciously well-adapted for simple recollection, advance towards it as if on wings by the help of these little silent pauses. Why? Because they never stifle or interfere with the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, by the exercise of natural activity or by the fear of wasting time. Then again, good people who lack such an inclination, not only advance towards it by their heroic patience during these long and painful pauses, but they may even experience the divine attraction at such times and yield themselves up to it. Finally, certain people, well-disposed though still very imperfect, together with some sinners very weak, indeed, but deeply and sincerely desirous of repentance, receive as a result of their numble desires and patient waiting, a grace which intermingles frequent passing touches

of this divine recollection with their meditations, prayers, readings, and elevations of the mind and heart to God. This, however, would never happen were these souls to place obstacles in the way, either by the constant practice of intense reflective acts or by anxiety to practise them.

*Q.* But if these transient touches of divine attraction should become longer and more frequent and gradually change my prayer into pure and simple recollection, how am I then to prepare myself for this new kind of prayer?

*A.* As we never know at what time or how long God will be pleased to keep us peacefully and perfectly recollected in His presence, we must always begin our prayer as usual; and consequently, we must always make our usual preparation for it.

*Q.* But what preparation is necessary when this recollection, having become habitual, gives us, what Bossuet calls, a happy facility for praying in this simple manner?

*A.* Since the preparation has already been made by means of a fixed and permanent disposition which, as the Bishop of Meaux says, prepares the soul for prayer, it will be enough for us to recall a truth of faith, a word of Holy Scripture, a good thought, or one of the mysteries of our religion; to place ourselves before God by a simple remembrance of His presence; and to dispel from our minds all ideas of sensible

things, in order that we may occupy ourselves only with God or with our Lord Jesus Christ, — as St. John of the Cross teaches.

Q. But in this method of prayer which excludes reflective acts, what becomes of the resolutions formerly made during meditation?

A. We can make them at other times. The time of recollection is not the proper time for them. Each kind of exercise requires its own time, as Bossuet and Father Baltasar say! <sup>1</sup> Moreover, this recollection influences us very strongly to do good and to avoid evil; and hence it leaves us much better prepared to keep our good resolutions than formerly when they used to be made with no results.

Q. Tell me now, whence comes this happy facility you mention?

A. From the special operation of the Holy Ghost. That which time and repeated efforts cannot accomplish with the help of ordinary grace, is effected by the Holy Ghost easily and quickly through a special grace of simple recollection. Hence some persons who pray thus will, at the very first attempt, perform certain difficult and heroic acts with as much facility as those who have acquired the power after great trouble and effort. Nor should this surprise us, since in this prayer, our heart turns to and leans upon God, unites itself with God and reposes in God; and God, on His

<sup>1</sup> 1. VII, §10. Cf. *Vie du P. B. Alvarez*, ch. LX.

part, speaks and answers in the same way by leaning toward our heart, pouring Himself into it, uniting Himself with it, reposing in it and finding His pleasure therein. Is it strange that we should find all in Him who is all? What wonder that in this life virtue should be acquired and perfected just in proportion to our union with God, when in heaven perfect union will give us all the virtues in perfection?

*Q.* Does Scripture afford no example of this kind of prayer — that is, of the interrupting of reasoning, at intervals, in order to practice the presence of God?

*A.* The publican “who stood afar off”<sup>1</sup> was undoubtedly praying thus. Recall the prompt and surprising effect of his prayer. If we knew nothing more than that about it, what fancies we should invent as to the fervent, continuous and beautiful acts he must have been making in his excellent prayer. How surprised we should be to find in it nothing but these short and simple words, “O, God, be merciful to me a sinner.” And do you suppose that he was repeating these words so quickly and incessantly that he had to gasp for breath? No indeed! Surely after having pronounced them, either with his lips or his heart, he kept himself interiorly occupied with the impression which had prompted him to pronounce them. Without doubt, he tried, for as long a time as possible, silently to preserve the pious sentiment expressed in

<sup>1</sup> Lk. XVIII, 13.

these few words. And surely when his feelings began to die out, he tried to revive them again with the simple repetition of the same words. And unquestionably the simple and direct movements of his heart formed the chief part of his prayer. The Gospel makes that clear enough. For, in relating the few short words of the sinner's prayer, what a vivid and exact picture it paints of his whole exterior! Undoubtedly this is done in order by the humble posture of his body sensibly to represent the humble attitude of his soul, utterly confounded at the memory of past sin, contrite, annihilated, and groaning aloud to God.

Did the woman who was troubled with an issue of blood pray any differently? She said within herself merely these few words, "If I shall touch only His garment, I shall be healed!"<sup>1</sup>

But let us omit consideration of a hundred such examples and turn to the one given by Jesus Christ, our model. How did He pray in the garden? Both St. Matthew and St. Mark expressly tell us that He said always "the self-same word."<sup>2</sup> No doubt, He interrupted his speech often and for long intervals, since although the words were so few, His prayer lasted three hours.

Q. What conclusion, or rather what fruit, can be gathered from these examples?

<sup>1</sup> Mt. IX, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. XXVI, 44: Mk. XIV, 39.

A. We shall be saved from the error made by many people who never think they are praying or meditating well, unless they are in a state of constant interior movement, heaping reflections upon reflections, prayers upon prayers, acts upon acts. What should be done is to omit whatever is superfluous and to replace it with the main thing, attention of the heart. This attention most persons value but little, although without it vocal prayers are only vain sounds, and meditation and spiritual reading mere intellectual amusements.

Now the shortest and easiest way of omitting what is superfluous in our pious exercises and of devoting ourselves to the main thing, namely attention of the heart, is to observe the two rules prescribed above, and to develop the ability to remain before God in peace, in silence, and in watchfulness,—especially when by divine attractions we are called to this holy and loving repose. This repose is the end and the principal fruit of prayer, since on the one hand, we seek God only in order to find Him, to be united with Him and to repose in Him; and on the other hand, such union and repose constitute all our sanctity on earth, as perfect union and eternal repose will constitute our happiness in heaven. Alas! if with a little less confidence in self, and in our own industry and activity, we had a little more confidence in God and a little more abandonment to the Holy Spirit, and if we were



then to apply ourselves for some time to practise all our pious exercises with these holy dispositions, directors and preachers would not have so much reason constantly to reproach us for gathering little fruit from meditations, readings, Masses, Communions, and especially from vocal prayer which, when not animated by the heart nor united to this interior spirit, resembles a body without a soul and remains utterly ineffectual.

*Q.* If we possess the required dispositions, can we attain holy recollection by the use of mere vocal prayer?

*A.* Recall what Bossuet quotes from St. Teresa concerning the widow who employed many hours in reciting the Our Father, the intervals between the words being spent in real, though unintentional, contemplation. 'Today in country places may we not still see something quite like this? There we find people,—simple enough indeed, though both innocent and virtuous,—who know very few vocal prayers and are incapable of any further instruction, but who recite their prayers slowly, pausing at intervals to practise the presence of God. While thus engaged, they remain whole hours in church, without weariness, without fatigue and with such an air of modesty, respect and attention as to edify and touch the beholder. Ask them afterwards what they have been saying to God. They will reply, with tears in their eyes, that they

do not know how to pray, that they have never been able to learn. What have they been doing there so long then? What secret charm held them, and what gave them so delightful a taste of piety, so deep a peace and sweetness that they could hardly tear themselves away from the holy place? Let each one think about it as he pleases. As for me, I am convinced, and I am ready to affirm, that they were practising the prayer of faith, the prayer of the simple presence of God, the prayer of simplicity, — which many scholars do not understand and never will understand “unless they are humble and have a right heart toward God !”,<sup>1</sup> that is, unless they humble themselves before God and seek Him “in simplicity of heart,” to use the expression of Scripture.

*Q.* In view of all that you have said and intimated concerning the facility of cultivating this kind of prayer, I cannot quite understand why so few pious people receive the habit of it from God.

*A.* It is because most people, instead of disposing themselves to receive this grace, place all sorts of obstacles in the way; because they make positive efforts to render themselves unworthy of even the slightest passing touches of this grace; because there are so few who aspire to perfect purity alone, so few who are willing to bind themselves to pray regularly, so few who, in praying, observe the rules prescribed,

<sup>1</sup> *Préface*, § 6.

so few who do not stifle or disturb the sweet inspiration of the Holy Spirit through lack of knowledge or of fidelity, so few, finally, who have courage enough, when the sensible divine attraction ceases, to surrender themselves forever into God's hands, in pure spirit and faith, with perfect abandonment, — as the venerable Mother de Chantal did for many years.

Q. What rules should be followed by such as have, through a special grace, attained to this simple prayer?

A. To treat this point systematically, we must first separate such persons into three classes, — the beginners, the advanced and the proficient.

## SIXTH DIALOGUE.

### Rules or Suggestions for Beginners.

*Q.* What suggestions have you for beginners?

*A.* Mainly three; these, however, include many others.

*Q.* What is the first?

*A.* To cultivate recollection at every favorable opportunity. Often during spiritual reading, or at Mass, or at Holy Communion, or after some little act of self-denial, or in consequence of a good thought or of a brief raising of the heart to God, or on similar occasions, we feel ourselves interiorly attracted by what may be called a sudden taste of God. This is really the work of the Holy Spirit. These moments are favorable opportunities not so much for speaking to God as for silently listening to Him. At such times, we should not exercise our usual activity, but rather simply submit to God's activity within us, and remain as long as possible in that loving and quiet attitude which can best be designated as an attentive repose, and which virtually contains many good acts, all of them well known to God.

Q. What are the benefits of this holy practice?

A. First, touched by our continual attention, confidence and abandonment, God effects within us whatever He knows to be best for us; and on our part there is no interference. In the second place, we gradually form and strengthen the blessed habit of dwelling before God in repose and attentive silence, — a habit far more difficult to acquire than is ordinarily supposed.

Q. How can that be? At first sight, nothing seems easier than this silent repose. Indeed, to many it seems so easy that they regard it as idleness.

A. The difficulty of acquiring this habit comes first from our secret presumption and vain confidence. We behave as if persuaded that no progress could be made unless our own share in the activity were greater than God's. St. Catherine of Genoa relates what our Lord said to her about this. She had asked, "Lord, how is it that in the time of the apostles and prophets, Thou didst work so many great things, and gavest Thyself so abundantly to men; whereas now, it is far otherwise?" Our Lord replied: "My daughter, men used to be more simple and more diffident. Formerly they depended entirely on Me; but now they are so self-confident, so concerned about what they themselves are doing and saying, that they do not even give Me time to work My will in their souls. They are incessantly repeating things to Me; as if I were likely to

forget anything. They wish to say everything themselves and to do everything in their own way."

Secondly, the difficulty comes from the fact that it is extremely repugnant to our self-love and our natural mental activity for us thus to renounce our own thoughts, reflections, and customary operations, and to confine ourselves to simple direct acts, hardly perceived and hardly perceptible. This is a real dying to oneself and is perhaps the most mortifying kind of interior self-denial.

*Q.* Do the saints seem ever to have experienced this difficulty?

*A.* They do, indeed. The venerable Mother de Chantal actually felt that she required an express command in order to overcome her shrinking.

"My Father," she wrote to her holy director, "order me to keep myself in this repose and silence. I trust that my mind will respect your commands."

The pious Bishop replied: "Your prayer of simple rest (recollection) in God is extremely holy and salutary. Do not doubt this. . . . You have only to keep on practising it quietly."<sup>1</sup>

St. Francis de Sales often vainly urged himself to preserve this interior silence so that he might follow his attraction. Once when his mind had grown weary with prolonged discoursing, he cried out:

<sup>1</sup> 1. VIII, § 27. Cf. *Vie de la M. de Chantal*, liv. VII, ép. XXII.

“O my God, do Thou Thyself arrest this wanderer!”

Now if the practice which some are pleased to regard as idleness, seemed so difficult to St. Francis de Sales, would it not be wise for people to refrain from pronouncing upon it with so much assurance until they have tried to practise it themselves, or at least, until they have been better instructed on the matter?

*Q.* But supposing that a favorable opportunity for recollection happens to occur during vocal prayer or during spiritual reading, ought these exercises to be interrupted?

*A.* If the prayers are not of obligation, we should quietly interrupt them and devote ourselves to recollection as long as the attraction lasts. According to Bossuet, to act thus is simply to abandon the less perfect for the more perfect.

If these prayers are of obligation, as for instance, in the case of the Divine Office, then provided that we are alone and are sure of having time to finish them afterwards, we should do well to suspend the recitation during such blessed moments, on condition that the interruptions do not last too long. This is what spiritual writers recommend. When we resume our recitation afterwards, we shall be able to continue it with all the greater attention and devotion. Surely the most perfect way of reciting the Divine Office, is to recite it with recollection in the presence of God.



And now as to spiritual reading. Although to attend to things written about God is profitable, yet it is still better to listen to God Himself, when He deigns to speak in the inner recesses of our hearts. Moreover, excepting the case of necessary instruction, we need not attend to what we are reading any further than is needful in order that our hearts should taste it. It is an established maxim with the mystics that we enter more deeply into the truths of faith by peacefully tasting them than by any amount of reasoning. Hence some simple persons, with neither learning nor wisdom, have grander ideas of God and of the mysteries of faith than souls who confine themselves to intellectual investigation. The Psalmist said, "Taste ye and see";<sup>1</sup> and not, — as might have been expected, — "See ye and taste." A great modern mystic well versed in this matter, has said: "The words we read are only the rind of the fruit, but the taste of God we obtain is, as it were, the juice which nourishes and strengthens the soul."

Q. But I do not quite understand how a simple taste of God can produce these great results in the soul.

A. It is a general principle that the heart is bound to an object more easily, quickly and permanently by taste and feeling than by knowledge. Note the wonderful attachment that a single taste of

<sup>1</sup> Ps. XXXIII, 9.

the miserable pleasures and vain amusements of the world can produce in persons otherwise very sensible. This may help you to understand how the soul is attached to God more strongly in the measure that its taste of Him is more perceptible and more sweet. When the soul tastes God, its increase of knowledge keeps pace with its feelings.

*Q.* And now, what is your second suggestion?

*A.* It concerns the way in which we should receive the gift of a perceptible taste of God. Beginners who are, as St. Paul says, usually nourished with the milk of spiritual consolation, are apt to abuse these consolations and on that account, soon to be deprived of them.

*Q.* How may this danger be avoided?

*A.* Our consolations should be received in a spirit of noble disinterestedness; we must never become attached to them.

*Q.* Why must we be disinterested?

*A.* In order that we may never be led to pray for selfish purposes; and that our motive in praying may always be to obey God's will and to learn how to conform to it better and better. Disinterestedness is necessary again, that we may never let ourselves be carried away by sweetness and led to act as a famishing person does when presented with food and drink. Sensible tastes are only means of union with God. We must not dally in them; we must always keep

moving on toward God who has bestowed them only to help lead us to Himself. These tastes should be valued only in so far as they remedy our infirmities and inspire us with disgust for creatures. In a word, since God requires moderation in all things, our behavior during these blessed moments should be something like the behavior of temperate people at table; they eat to sustain life and health and strength and not merely to please the palate.

Q. Why must we avoid attachment to these sensible consolations?

A. Because God and not His gifts should be the object of all our attachments. To be attached to His gifts would beget in us over-eagerness when they are bestowed, and anxiety when they are withdrawn.

Q. But is not such anxiety holy? and what harm then can result from it?

A. This, that whenever God shall withdraw sensible consolation, we shall always experience uneasiness, trouble and grief.

Q. Then He does sometimes withdraw it? Why so?

A. God deals with beginners as a mother with her son. When training him, she often opposes him just for the sake of teaching him that he must have no other will than hers. She makes him come and go at her bidding, do a thing and then undo it, lay down

what he has just taken up and take up again what he has just laid down. In the same way, God, in order to render souls pliant and flexible in His hands, opposes their holiest desires. A hundred times a day He lets them experience the sweet approach of a consolation which comes, is felt, and vanishes, all in a single instant. Occasionally, our prayer consists in nothing but a constant recurrence of these phenomena; though in the end it will result most profitably if, by holy detachment from all things of sense, we practise heroic renunciation of our own will and blindly submit to God's will.

Q. And what harm can result from a holy eagerness to retain God's gifts?

A. The harm comes from our wishing to appropriate them. We act like badly trained or ill-natured children who, unless force is used, will never yield up what they have once got in their hands. Such eagerness produces that excessive caution which St. Teresa treats as superstition when she speaks of persons so jealous of the sweetness of their recollection that they are afraid to cough, to move or even to breathe.<sup>1</sup> "They act," says St. Francis de Sales, "as if on account of these necessary movements, God was going to deprive them of a favor conferred the moment before."<sup>2</sup> Hence neither charity, zeal nor prudence

<sup>1</sup> *Way of Perfection*, ch. XXXI.

<sup>2</sup> *Entretiens*, XVIII.

will induce these persons to relinquish the sweetness of their recollection, — still less will they cheerfully relinquish it, if some providential misfortune comes to test their docility and to strip them of their own wills in order to clothe them in the will of God. Finally this anxiety causes them to indulge in much reflection about themselves and their recollection, and so to bring on many wilful distractions which, diverting the soul's inner gaze from God and toward self, deprive it of the recollection it is anxious to preserve. St. Francis de Sales used to say that the surest means of preserving holy recollection is to disregard it, for it will be lost by those who cherish it too fondly.<sup>1</sup> He used also to cite the words spoken by the Spouse in the Canticle to His beloved: "Turn thy eyes, for they have made Me flee away."<sup>2</sup>

Q. What is the real meaning of these words?

A. They teach us to suppress all curiosity about what is happening within us during recollection. We must be content with feeling in a general way that many things are happening which God hides from us. We must trust in Him and abandon ourselves to Him. Afterwards, perhaps, He will let us know more.

Q. And now, what is your final suggestion?

A. It concerns distractions. There are several kinds of distractions. Some of them do not interfere

<sup>1</sup> *Love of God*, Bk. VI, ch. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Cant. Cant.* VI, 4.

at all with recollection; others are even favorable to it; and others, again, are of such a nature that they cause suffering by, as it were, dividing the faculties of the soul.

Q. Well, we need not concern ourselves very much about the first kind, since they do not interfere with recollection; still you had better tell me what they are.

A. They consist of certain vagrant thoughts which pass through the mind, appearing and disappearing with the rapidity of lightning, while the heart remains all the time attached to the object of its affections. You see the heart's sweet repose is decided enough to counterbalance these trifling distractions; just as the pleasure of listening to a fine voice is enough to counterbalance the distraction caused by a slight noise, so that we continue to hear the delightful in spite of the annoying sounds.

Q. And now tell me what are the distractions that favor recollection?

A. Those which God employs in bestowing recollection.

Q. How does he do that, and why?

A. Suppose that with much effort and the assistance of ordinary grace, we have acquired active recollection which is both difficult to get and hard to keep. Now the mind is still disposed to wander and to stray away in useless thoughts and reflections. The

instant we become conscious of any such involuntary wandering, there occurs in the soul a certain interior motion, a kind of mental recoil, which brings us back to ourselves before we know how or why. Then we find ourselves in a new sort of recollection quite different from the former, sweet, continual and easy. After many such experiences, the soul "trained in the school of the heart," realizes that this infused recollection is not the fruit of human labor or industry but is bestowed by God on whomsoever He pleases and by whatever means He pleases.

*Q.* And now, what are the distractions which cause so much suffering by dividing the faculties of the soul?

*A.* They consist of the follies and extravagances of the imagination, which occur while the mind and the heart are occupied with God, and which seem cruelly to divide the soul within itself. St. Teresa says that she was in this sad state for a long time and that she never found any remedy but patience.<sup>1</sup> She gives her opinion characteristically by quoting the Spanish proverb, "Provided the mill grinds out the flour, care not for the noise of the mill-clapper." Thus she compares a disordered imagination to a distressingly loud mill-clapper; the heart attached to God and occupied with Him, being the mill which is grinding out the soul's spiritual nourishment.

<sup>1</sup> *Castle of the Soul*, ch. 1.



Q. Does not the imagination sometimes lead the mind astray?

A. Yes; and, as if for our instruction, St. Teresa herself experienced that also. "My mind", she says, "wandered about like an insane person from room to room." "But we must not run after our minds," she adds, "for in rushing after the wandering mind and the vagabond imagination to recall them, we run the risk of ruining all, by losing our sweet repose of heart in God."

Q. Then what should we do?

A. We should remain in this sweet repose of heart. Our wandering faculties will gradually be led back by the sweet attraction, as a swarm of bees is drawn toward a hive by some pleasant sound or some fragrant odor,—to cite the illustration used by St. Francis de Sales. St. Teresa says that this happy reunion of the powers during a perfectly calm repose in God, makes holy souls feel that there is nothing further left for them to desire.

Q. But how can the faculties thus first separate, and then unite?

A. Well, at any rate, the fact is rendered indisputable by the testimony of St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales. What these saints have written, should go far towards convincing us; for besides the gift of sanctity, they had also, to say the very least, as much intelligence and acuteness as ourselves.

By way of illustrating their words we may recall to mind what occurs in a soul under the spell of a strong, ardent passion, but moved, despite itself, by sad thoughts and fancies. In such a case there takes place a painful division between the faculties. But once let the passion-inflamed heart win over to itself the other powers and immediately all sad thoughts and fancies vanish. There is now no longer interior division or contradiction. All is harmony, union, peace, and in consequence, the soul is perfectly tranquil.

## SEVENTH DIALOGUE..

### **Advice to Advanced Persons on the Dryness of Their Prayer and on Their Special Temptations.**

Q. Why are persons advanced in prayer more apt to suffer dryness than others are?

A. Because as they are no longer in what St. Paul calls spiritual infancy, God begins to give them more substantial but less delicious nourishment. Their recollection is called dry and arid because it is exactly that, neither more nor less.

Q. Is this kind of recollection very different from that already described?

A. Not at all, except in its degree of sweetness. The advanced are occupied with God but do not taste Him. Their hearts remain quiet before Him in a sort of dry peace. Usually they are free from weariness, but they are also without sweetness. When their prayer is over, the will, indeed, is more than ever inclined toward good, but there is an utter lack of sweetness and sensible devotion in the soul—a painful condition for persons used to those things. Like children who are being weaned, they show their grief by sadness and tears. But they must learn to be

ashamed of this weakness and to struggle against it; since they are experiencing only what God wills, and this is His ordinary method of dealing with souls.

*Q.* Can you give me any reason why He chooses this method?

*A.* Spiritual teachers say that God deals thus with souls for His greater glory, which requires that He should be served with perfect disinterestedness; and perfect disinterestedness seldom accompanies the enjoyment of what flatters self-love, since we are naturally inclined to become rather attached to pleasant things. Still God's way is really in accord with our own best interests, because this dry way of pure faith, as it is called, gradually leads us to a pure and perfectly disinterested love which is the measure of sanctity and of all perfection.

*Q.* What is the first and most dangerous temptation of the advanced?

*A.* The temptation to abandon this new kind of prayer under various pretexts which are all mere delusions and temptations of the enemy.

*Q.* What is the first pretext put forward?

*A.* A conviction, or at least a fear, that the gift of recollection has been lost, because prayer is no longer either attractive or enjoyable.

*Q.* How can we resist this temptation and avoid its consequences?

*A.* The chief way is humble obedience and blind

submission to the judgment and will of our directors. Then again, we can reflect as follows: "My prayer has been examined and approved. I have chosen it for good reasons, under wise advice, and after much experience of its benefits. Hence I am not tempting God; and here, as everywhere, I may abandon myself to Him and await the result with perfect confidence." The Bishop of Meaux teaches that, because of its great simplicity, this kind of prayer is always best known by its effects.<sup>1</sup> Now so long as the effects are good, the source must be good too, — for our Lord has said that no bad tree brings forth good fruit.

Q. Should we indulge in all these reflections during the time of prayer?

A. On the contrary, we should carefully guard against doing so, as they would be merely so many distractions. But we must be so thoroughly permeated with these ideas beforehand that, even when consolation is withdrawn, no voluntary doubt can disturb our repose. Otherwise we shall be deprived of all the fruit of our recollection each time that we are left without sensible consolation. If the temptation becomes very urgent, we should encourage ourselves by repeating some such words as these: "This is not the time for me to reflect upon what is occurring within me, nor to think about what should be done. I can think of all that after my prayer is finished, just

<sup>1</sup> 1. VII, § 16.

as people make reviews at the close of their meditations.”

*Q.* But if this recollection is so arid and so hard to persevere in, it must surely be an infused gift, must it not?

*A.* What matter whether it be infused or acquired, passive or active? Are not both kinds true prayer? We may, therefore, piously persevere in it, disregarding the deceits of the enemy who tries to turn us away from the practice of the presence of God. We are certain that we have at least the will and desire to remain in His holy presence; and this is the essential element of all true prayer.

*Q.* But without the help of consolations or sensible attractions to win back our wandering faculties, how shall we overcome the distractions which in this kind of prayer are apt to be so frequent and so powerful?

*A.* It is admitted by all that neither the imagination nor the understanding is absolutely under our own control; and again, that no distractions can hurt us except such as are voluntary. Now in this kind of recollection, voluntary distractions are the less likely to occur, because when we reach this stage of progress, we are sufficiently detached from creatures to be safe from those alluring and dangerous inclinations that bind heart and mind to favorite or familiar objects. Moreover, a soul accustomed to interior recollection is

quicker than another soul to detect and immediately expel the slightest distraction.

*Q.* Why so?

*A.* Well, if we are used to looking into our own souls, we find it easy enough to do as I have said. We have only to act the same as in the external order. For example: if, while in the presence of some very distinguished personage, we suddenly find that our eyes have been roving hither and thither, we at once recall them and fix them modestly and quietly upon the person to whom this mark of respect is due. It is the same in the interior order; when we discover that we have been wandering, we simply begin again to look at God, whom we have been neglecting.

*Q.* Yes, but this way of acting is not so easy in the internal as in the external order.

*A.* Granted, if there be question of persons unfamiliar with the operation under consideration. But we are speaking of those who have gone through it a thousand times, and who can repeat it whenever they wish. And if the imperceptibility of the operation sometimes inclines them to doubt its reality, they are conscious, nevertheless, of their desire to be recollected; and this suffices to put them at ease.

*Q.* But what if the dryness and accompanying distractions, though neither attractive nor interesting, should become continual and irresistible?

*A.* For the comfort and consolation of timid souls,



let me begin by supposing that in addition to what you have mentioned, I am also afflicted with horrible temptations, such as have been permitted by God in the case of various saints. Nevertheless, since it is certain that all merit and demerit come from the free acts of the will alone, the answer is easy. For tell me this: does not everything which leads me away from God, especially during prayer, cause me infinite displeasure? Is it not felt to be a cross, a kind of martyrdom? Well, then surely I am not consenting to it. Why the very pain of my heart is a continual repudiation of the distraction.

*Q.* But does this suffice without an explicit act of repudiation?

*A.* Of course. Indeed, without such pain, no act of repudiation would be of any use. Suffering is the will's real repudiation and expression of displeasure when confronted by evil. This movement of the will antedates all outward manifestation and, as Bossuet says, is one of those direct acts which are the source and origin of all other good acts.

*Q.* What you have said proves that God is not offended at the things which I suffer, despite myself, during prayer; but is my suffering meritorious?

*A.* Everything suffered for God's sake is meritorious; and the merit steadily increases in proportion to the painful dryness, the annoying distractions and the humiliating, torturing temptations we experience.

Q. But suppose I am afraid of having occasioned them myself?

A. Well, if you are sure that you have occasioned them, then immediately repudiate whatever may have occasioned your fault; and patiently bear your punishment just as if, through excesses, you had fallen into serious disease or infirmity.

Q. Alas! If I were only sure that this was really a trial sent by God, I should be encouraged and my pain made easy to bear.

A. Another delusion caused by secret pride! The word "trial" pleases and flatters our vanity; whereas the word "punishment" makes us rebel because it humiliates us. But is it not equally just and meritorious for us to receive the stripes dealt by God's justice and to receive the gifts bestowed by his mercy? Moreover, the evils of this life are never merely punishments; mercy and justice meet in them, to use the words of Holy Writ. Ordinarily speaking, at least, there is no cross which is not a test as well as a chastisement, a dictate of mercy as well as of justice. Even as a chastisement it is not nearly so great as our faults deserve; and as a test, it offers us the opportunity of gaining much; for the goodness of God turns to our advantage, all that we suffer in submission to His will. Hence one of the Fathers of the Church has said: "The goodness of our Heavenly Father is so great that even His anger and His stripes are sprung of His mercy."

*Q.* But even if these sufferings are meritorious, they certainly do not advance us in the path of perfection ; and this is enough to discourage those who have an ardent desire of progress.

*A.* Beware of new delusions. Such a desire as you mention is very praiseworthy ; but, so long as it is not mixed with pride and self-love, it will always remain submissive to the will of God and consequently will be free from trouble and discouragement. We must desire perfection only in the measure and at the time appointed by God ; only through the means and in the way that He pleases. To desire perfection in any other way would be to desire it for our own satisfaction rather than for God's. To wish to be enriched with virtues would be to wish to see ourselves adorned and decorated for our own, instead of God's enjoyment. In a word, this would be to desire perfection less for God's sake than for the sake of our own excellence. What a fine and subtle selfishness ! Yet how many spiritual persons have these false ideas about progress, just as ordinary people have false ideas about devotion !

*Q.* How are we to avoid or to overcome all the vain fears, delusions and temptations which turn us away from prayer and especially from this kind of prayer ? Above all, how shall this be done when recollection seems to be fruitless and a mere waste of time ?

A. The proper way to accomplish all this is to form a correct idea of progress, which is by no means what it is ordinarily supposed to be.

Q. What is progress, then?

A. Progress consists in always advancing along the holy path of conformity to the will of God. Consult Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the theologians; all alike will tell you that true love or perfection consists in always wishing exactly what God wishes,—as our Lord teaches in various passages of the Scripture. Thus, for instance, He says: “He that doth the will of My Father Who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”; and again, “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father hath given me command, so do I”; and still again, “My meat is to do the will of Him Who sent Me”; and finally, “In the head of the book, it is written of Me: that I should do Thy will, O God.”<sup>1</sup>

Now it is the teaching of faith that everything which happens in this world—sin alone excepted—happens by the will of God. This holds even with regard to the most insignificant events,—the falling of a hair from the head of one of the millions of mankind, or the dropping of a single leaf in the midst of a vast forest. Hence, if out of submission to God’s will, I undergo most humiliat-

<sup>1</sup> Mt. VII, 21.—Jn. IV, 34.—Heb. X, 7.—Ps. XXXIX, 8.

ing and mortifying experiences during my prayer, I am performing not merely one good act, but a long series of acts which make for further and further progress toward perfect conformity with the will of God.

Q. And when, after this long series of repeated acts, I have at length acquired great facility in producing them, what then remains to be done?

A. You still have a long road to travel. You must acquire perfect conformity; and after that, you must still advance through a thousand new degrees until finally you attain to that uniformity of will to which our Lord referred when He said: "That they may be one as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us."<sup>1</sup> Of course, this will never come to pass until by means of wishing only what God wishes, as He wishes, and because He wishes, our wills at last become in every sense uniform with the will of God. Nor is this the end. We must pass through still other new degrees until finally we reach what the mystics call "deiformity," a state wherein the will is completely transformed into that of God. This is the perfection of which our Lord spoke when He said: "That they may be perfected in one;"<sup>2</sup> and for which He makes us ask daily in these words of the Our Father, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," For in Heaven, there is not

<sup>1</sup> Jn. XII, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. XII, 23.

mere conformity and uniformity of the human will and the divine will; but there is a veritable "deiformity," far more perfect than that of the greatest saints while upon earth, even including St. Paul who could say: "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me."<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then, that St. Teresa, taught in the school of the Holy Spirit, should conclude her instruction on the sublimest union possible in contemplation, by saying, "To my mind, the most precious and most desirable of all unions is the union of will." Similar to this is the teaching of St. Francis de Sales who says: "The height of love's ecstasy is to find our will not in our own contentment but in God's, or to find our contentment not in our own but in God's will."<sup>2</sup>

Q. If all this be true, then, no matter what happens during prayer, we have only to remain firm, in entire conformity with the will of God permitting all that occurs. But how comes it that so many spiritual persons let themselves be troubled and disturbed, and frequently conclude their prayer in such disgust and discouragement that they feel strongly tempted to abandon it altogether?

A. Perhaps these persons do not realize that trouble and uneasiness are incompatible with prayer and destructive of all its fruits, chief among which is peace. Perhaps they are ignorant that our merit and

<sup>1</sup> Gal. II, 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Love of God*, Bk. VI, ch. XI.

progress are proportioned to our attempts to accept God's will in the sending of those interior crosses which wound the heart in its most sensitive and delicate parts. Or perhaps they have never learned that great maxim: "More progress is made by suffering than by acting;" a maxim justified by the double fact that it is harder to suffer than to act, and that we act according to our own wills but suffer according to the will of God. Perhaps again, such persons suppose that feeling is the test of prayer and of devotion, and that these have a value which is proportioned to our emotion, or to our ability to produce perceptible acts at will. Alas! will people never learn the meaning of St. Paul's words: "We walk by faith and not by sight"?<sup>1</sup> Will they never seek God in the spirit of pure faith, and strive by directness and purity of heart to obtain the grace of simplicity? Finally perhaps many persons, under the pretext of possessing a good intention and of desiring only spiritual goods and the grace of prayer, really seek themselves alone and wish to obtain whatever pleases them at the time and in the manner they choose; as if the simple will of God were not to be the sole rule of our good desires and of our holiest quests.

Q. Do you really mean then, that we should remain perfectly tranquil during prayer and should depart quite contented even if, despite our pure inten-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. V, 7.



tion of seeking only salvation and perfection, we have been able to do nothing that we wished and have obtained nothing that we asked for?

A. Oh, how different is our intercourse with God and our intercourse with men! When our most persistent prayers and most earnest solicitations obtain nothing from a man, we go away greatly dissatisfied; and, in a sense, this is reasonable, since our hands remain empty. But when dealing with God, we have only to stay before Him in peace and then to depart contented, — and this, too, is reasonable, since we have surely obtained something. We retire with hands never empty but always full. Full of what? Why, full of the refusals and rebuffs given by God; for to be humiliated and mortified by Him is a pleasure to us so long as it pleases Him. What contents Him, also contents me. Always and in all things, I desire only what He desires; and I desire it so strongly that I take joy in my disappointment, if it gives pleasure to my God.

Setting aside all question of sincerity, certain it is that the clever courtiers of an earthly sovereign profess to follow this rule. Why then, should I not follow it honestly in dealing with God? After I shall have done all I can do, and followed all my director's counsels, I shall disturb myself no further about the apparent failure of my prayers. I shall try to find my pleasure in pleasing God, since all else is but selfish-

ness and vanity. And far from growing discouraged or considering myself to be miserable and wretched because of my seemingly poor prayers, I shall reckon myself the richer before God in proportion as I shall have renounced my own will and accepted His.

O my God! let me enrich myself thus, little by little; let me clothe myself with the things most precious and most pleasing to Thee, namely, with the most enduring, the most humble, the most disinterested submission of mind and heart to Thy adorable will! I sacrifice my own will beforehand, laying it down at the foot of Thy throne with Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ, — and to use the words placed by Thy Holy Spouse on the lips of Thy ministers at the sacred Canon of the Mass: “*per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso.*”

Q. Have you no other advice or explanations for advanced persons?

A. Yes, I have; but since they are rather lengthy, we may as well reserve them for the next dialogue.

## EIGHTH DIALOGUE.

### On Vacancy of Mind, Mental Helplessness and Extraordinary Revolts of the Passions.

Q. What is meant by vacancy of mind?

A. The phrase almost explains itself; it means a mind apparently empty of all thought about God, and perhaps of all thoughts about creatures. So long as a soul, for the sake of its humiliation and purification is kept in this state of vacancy by God, it imagines that it has fallen into a sort of stupidity and foolishness and has become incapable of attention to God or to any good thing.

Q. What is the result?

A. When we are in this state, the moment we attempt to reflect or to think upon any good subject, our mind begins to wander and we become perfectly stupid. If we try to apply ourselves to prayer, all our usual acts become impossible and we feel nothing but the pain of desiring to pray while powerless to do so. If we wish to enter into our own souls, we are, as it were, unable to find the entrance; we are banished and exiled from our own hearts, as the *Imitation of Christ* says. Finally if we wish to devote ourselves to pious reading, we at once experience what St. Teresa

describes : "I read," she says, "and many times re-read some passages of a book without understanding them a bit more than if I were reading Greek or Hebrew."<sup>1</sup> What increases the weight of this heavy and humiliating cross is the sad contrast between the preceding state and the present where we are now suspended between earth and Heaven, being absolutely deprived of all consolation and of all support, whether external or internal.

*Q.* Perhaps this comes from a violent attack of melancholy or from natural stupidity?

*A.* Not at all; for those who possess the most cheerful and lively dispositions are affected in exactly the same way. It is a singular disposition of Providence that persons in this sad state appear externally to be the very opposite of what they are interiorly. They talk, they converse intelligently on all subjects, they reason well, and they even write of divine things with a facility surprising to themselves. This was the way with the Venerable Mother de Chantal, as indeed with a thousand others. She, being in charge of a large community, guided all the daughters of her Order during many years, while herself in so deplorable and helpless a condition and so unable to perform any act of piety that she became convinced her soul was utterly devoid of faith, hope, charity and religion. This threw her into a state of distress and confusion all the

<sup>1</sup> Autobiography, ch. XXX.

more intolerable because she was at that very time possessed of a higher esteem for virtue and of a stronger desire to practice it than before.

*Q.* What is the interior occupation of persons passing through this cruel test?

*A.* With regard to their degrees of darkness and helplessness, they may be divided into various classes; but in a general sense it may be said that such persons are occupied almost continually with God, each in his own way. They are thus occupied, however, not by means of reflex conscious acts, but by means of simple direct acts; or rather, by means of a mere disposition so indistinctly perceived that it forms, at one and the same time, their merit and their cross. Meanwhile, of course, they are without the consolation of knowing this.

*Q.* How can we tell that such persons are almost continually occupied with God?

*A.* Because their wills are and have long been fixed on God. Now, Bossuet<sup>1</sup> and the mystics teach that a will fixed on God produces a succession of good movements which may be regarded as a continual prayer. This, of course, is the same as being continually occupied with God.

*Q.* What grounds have Bossuet and the mystics for this opinion!

*A.* The words of our Lord: "Where your treasure

<sup>1</sup> 1. VI, § 43.

is there is your heart also." <sup>1</sup> Our hearts are with our treasures by means of simple movements and deliberate sentiments and affections, which are all true acts of the will, although not recognized as such by most people.

*Q.* But if these good souls with their wills fixed upon God, their treasure, were really making this succession of good movements, would they not perceive it, at least after having been told of it?

*A.* No; generally speaking, they would not. First, because these acts are so simple as to escape notice; and again, because they become much less perceptible during these interior trials. This is the teaching of the Bishop of Meaux, a prelate as far as possible removed from all suspicion of a tendency to Quietism. <sup>2</sup>

*Q.* But what if these good souls were to affirm that the movements within their souls were quite the contrary of those you have described?

*A.* Frequently they do affirm such things, with sad hearts and tearful eyes. But the director is only the more convinced that they are deceived.

*Q.* Why, what proof can he have that is strong enough to outweigh the feeling and consciousness of the persons most concerned?

*A.* Proofs as conclusive as one can desire, namely,

<sup>1</sup> Lk. XII, 34.

<sup>2</sup> 1. V, § 17.

the very sadness and tears already mentioned. Then again, proof will be found in certain manifestations of heart or chance expressions which reveal the dominant disposition of the soul.

It is as in the case of a worldling who, by confessing all his known sins, reveals to his director, the nature of his ruling passion. Does not the director immediately discover in the soul a hidden abyss of sins, unknown to the penitent because committed interiorly, without express consciousness, by constant and simple movements of the ruling passion? Similar results follow, when, by means of various manifestations, the penitent shows that he desires nothing so much as to please God, and fears nothing so much as to displease Him; that a mere doubt in this matter is a torment to his conscience. At once, the director perceives the dominant disposition of this soul to be what the mystics, with Bossuet and the other bishops, call continual prayer. So, article XIX of the Issy Conference runs as follows: "Perpetual prayer does not consist of one long uninterrupted act but rather of an habitual permanent disposition to avoid whatever displeases God and to perform whatever pleases Him." Hence, it is quite intelligible why every book and every preacher insist that salvation and perfection depend wholly upon our having good wills and being honest with God. Hence the Prophet exclaims: "How good is God to Israel, to them that



are of a right heart!"<sup>1</sup> Hence the angels proclaim the peace of the newborn Christ to the men of goodwill. Hence Saint Augustine says that charity consists in good will, and that when ardent, it is like a cry or a fervent prayer of the heart. Hence, finally, the Church sings: O, God, to whom every heart is open; and to whom we speak with our wills: *cui omne cor patet, et omnis voluntas loquitur.*<sup>2</sup>

*Q.* By way of further instruction on this important and consoling doctrine, will you tell me how a director can become morally certain that a soul truly possesses this habitual readiness and that the will is really fixed on God as its last end?

*A.* He can tell by certain expressions used by the persons in question; for although these souls vary somewhat according to their different degrees of darkness and helplessness, still I think that nearly all of them are in one or another of three classes.

*Q.* What expressions are used by the first class?

*A.* They say something like this: "It is very sad and distressing to have to pass the time of prayer and possibly whole days, without being able to pray, to raise my heart to God, to recollect myself even momentarily, or to fix my mind on anything good. It is quite useless for me to desire or to attempt any of these things, or to incite myself thereto; I find I am simply losing time." Thus they lament like poor people in extreme

<sup>1</sup> Ps. LXII, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Miss. vot. de Spiritu S.*

misery. Do worldly, or dissipated, or tepid, or commonplace souls ever feel such pains or make such lamentations as these? Then whence comes this suffering if not from a great good will fixed upon God and all on fire with pious desires? The very inability to satisfy these desires is in itself a cause of distress to these souls,—possibly for the reason that they are thus deprived of the sweet satisfaction of performing acts that are reflex, perceptible and manifest. Let them simply humble themselves on account of all these imperfections of self-love which God is trying to remove from them. After that, let them be both peaceful and contented; peaceful, because since God sees even the innermost recesses of their hearts, they need not care about the imperceptibility of their acts; contented, because the very pain they are suffering is itself something that contents and pleases God.

Q. What is said by persons of the second class?

A. They say it is not the humiliating and torturing stupidity, darkness and helplessness which distresses them, but the fear lest God should abandon them in consequence of some secret infidelity of theirs. This distressing dread constantly possesses and torments them. The source of it is clear. Now, these souls, too, should be both peaceful and contented; peaceful, because God sees the filial fear and the ineffectual desires hidden in their hearts and expressed only by smothered sighs; contented, because they are

as the Heavenly Bridegroom wishes them. Why grieve that instead of being adorned and decorated as they would desire, they seem hideous to themselves, when they are, on this very account, more acceptable to God, who, according to St. Augustine, is better pleased with us the less we are pleased with ourselves?

*Q.* And now, what is said by persons of the third class?

*A.* They say that their state has steadily grown worse, until at length it has become unbearable; that every resource is beginning to fail them; and that they no longer retain any of their first fervor. They declare that their souls are overpowered with insensibility, obduracy, repugnance for holy things, and feelings of spite, revolt, rage and blasphemy, none of which can be repudiated now as formerly; nor can acts of abandonment, or of submission, be now produced.

All this causes a kind of despondency which lacerates the very heart. These souls are in total despair, having apparently lost even the precious remnants of good sentiments retained in the preceding state. Their interior condition resembles that of Job. Like him, they too, should be peaceful and contented; peaceful because all these feelings of despair are really as so many loud cries ascending to Heaven and moving God the more in proportion as the soul's anguish is deeper; contented, because, as Bossuet says, our

pious sentiments are not really lost during these terrible trials, but are merely hidden in the soul's depths, perhaps even under the appearance of contrary sentiments, whence they will soon emerge purified and strengthened.<sup>1</sup> Do you still ask why these persons should be content? Because, according to St. Francis de Sales and the other mystics, "all the old sentiments of piety, having been concealed and, as it were, divested of everything sensuous, withdraw to that loftiest portion of the mind which is the throne of the whole inner kingdom."

Q. Is it possible that the holiest operations of grace take place in this manner?

A. What better authority would you have than Bossuet's statement<sup>2</sup> that even during a kind of rebellion against God, our sentiments of perfect submission remain intact? Hope, which seems dead, has but fortified and concentrated itself within the soul; the lower we are driven by despair, the higher our hope rises; love conceals itself under the form of bitter reproaches, sometimes even under seeming blasphemies which are really nothing but the expressions of a love piqued and goaded by the apparent scorn of a lover (God) who seems to be going away. This show of wrath by a soul driven to extremities, comes merely from violent grief at its own apparent rejection and

<sup>1</sup> 1. X, § 17.

<sup>2</sup> 1. X, § 17.

abandonment by God. Blessed Angela of Foligno, on one such occasions, exclaimed: "Lord, if Thou must cast me into hell, delay no longer; now that Thou hast abandoned me, plunge me at once into the abyss."<sup>1</sup> This is what the mystics call the despair of love, or despairing love. The blind and furious transports of profane love exhibit only too many instances of this kind. The sight of them should make us the readier to believe in the divine extravagances of a love which is stronger than death and which begets a jealous care for God's glory so great that not all the torments of hell can overcome it.<sup>2</sup>

Oh my God! how wonderful art Thou in Thy saints and how inscrutable is Thy dealing with them! Being the author both of nature and of grace, Thou canst change all without destroying anything. So Thou dost sanctify us by altering the direction of our passionate tendencies and dost convert our most violent natural inclinations into tendencies toward perfect love. On the other hand, how miserable are we since, as it were, we force Thee to perform Thy marvelous actions secretly and under cover of our rebellious passions, so that no vain complacency of ours may mar Thy divine action, but our humiliation may tend to preserve Thy divine operations in all their purity!

Q. But what should be done if to this dishearten-

<sup>1</sup> *Vita Ang.*, ch. XIX, apud Bossuet, l. IX, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Cant. Cant.*, VIII, 6.

ing helplessness there be added most violent and wicked temptations?

A. Two things, chiefly.

Q. Tell me the first.

A. We should convince ourselves that nothing we suffer is sinful unless consented to. On the contrary, every temptation resisted is a source of merit, purification and progress. If the heart, under violent and repeated assaults, holds fast to God, through love and through fear, it is sure to become more deeply imbued with this love and this fear. Indeed, all spiritual teachers unite in declaring that virtue increases its strength in the measure that its trials are severe. What does he know who has never suffered, who has never been tried?<sup>1</sup> Remember the lesson given to St. Paul when he thrice besought the Lord to deliver him from a temptation as violent and humiliating as a blow. God's answer was: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, our courage and confidence in God should increase, the more extraordinary, diabolical and extravagant our temptations become, either in themselves or relatively to our character, education, and condition; for this gives clearer evidence of God's permissive will. It sometimes happens that the holiest souls are allowed to suffer even diabolical assaults, — the very naming of which conveys a world of meaning

<sup>1</sup> *Eccli.*, XXXIV, 9.

<sup>2</sup> II Cor. XII, 9.

to such as have experienced them, although without much significance for others.

Q. What is the second thing to be done?

A. When the mind has been once enlightened, the heart should abandon itself with heroic courage and firm trust to whatever God may send, making no reserves except as to sin which, of course, can never please God.

Q. But how can we abandon ourselves to temptation, since temptation leads to sin?

A. We must distinguish three elements in every temptation, — danger of sin, extreme suffering of heart and great humiliation of mind. As to the first, we must always hate and detest it absolutely, begging deliverance from it, or at least from all danger of consent to it. As to the second, we must bear everything, even heartbreaking or martyrdom. As to the third, we must abandon ourselves to God's good pleasure, without reserve or limit, enduring all that He pleases, in the way He pleases, and as long as He pleases. Remember that the worst temptations, if not consented to, are great graces. So the saints, — for instance St. Paul, who was instructed by Jesus Christ, — ask to be delivered only of the danger of consenting to sin and never from what purifies the heart by crucifying self-love or humiliates the mind by filling it with confusion.

.Q What do spiritual teachers say of this conduct of God toward the soul?



A. They say that as He is the Supreme Master, He can do whatever He has determined upon from eternity, nor has any one the right to ask His reasons for so acting. They say divine justice requires that our cherished passions shall become our executioners and all the wilful pleasures of our guilty hearts be turned into bitterness. Divine wisdom and goodness likewise dictate that we shall never be perfectly cured of our vices until we have felt our own weakness and helplessness hundreds and hundreds of times over. Thus God alone will be given all the glory and no one else can take any credit for obtaining the happy result. Those who desire further instruction upon this point should read :

1st. The eighth chapter on great temptations in Guillore's *Progress*.

2d. The chapters written by the saintly M. Boudon, Archdeacon of Evreux, upon interior sufferings in *The Ways of the Cross*; a book by the way, which though imperfect in style, is filled with the spirit of God, and the unction of divine grace.

3d. Father Surin's chapters on trials in the first volume of his *Catéchisme Spirituel*, a treatise nearly identical with the old *Catéchisme* approved by Bossuet who bore splendid testimony to its worth by saying with reference to the point now under discussion : "This author after having had personal experience of trials wrote on the subject divinely."

## NINTH DIALOGUE.

### Advice for Those Who Have Made Great Progress.

Q. What is this advice to be about?

A. Three things chiefly ; the new purification of the heart by means of further detachment ; the great trials that induce this further detachment : the state of souls that have passed through the great purification and have attained to close union with God.

Q. Are new purifications always necessary? or can we finally reach a state where we need no more purifying?

A. Our whole life is a time of struggle and purification. Our purification will never be completed until we are in Heaven, that is until our voyage is over and we have arrived at the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

Q. Well, tell me how this new purification is effected?

A. By means of further detachment ; for attachment to objects other than God always defiles the heart.

Q. But what if the souls in question seem to be so detached that they love only God, and are constantly sighing for Him alone?

A. No matter ; even while apparently sighing for God alone, we may still retain attachments, not gross or sensual, understand, but very delicate and spiritual. So thoroughly is our nature fallen, that it corrupts even the holiest things ; or rather, it corrupts and defiles itself by attachment to these holy things. The heart, having been made for God alone, should love nothing but Him ; at least it should love nothing, except for His sake.

Q. Will you not develop this thought a little more ?

A. You know our in-born self-love is so strong that no sooner have we detached our heart from one thing than it attaches itself to another with equal ardor. Without altering its unhappy tendency, it merely changes the object. Thus it gives up its natural affections by merely transferring them from earthly to spiritual things ; since indeed, we usually love these latter far less for God's sake than for selfish reasons. Now this new attachment is the more hurtful because it appears to involve nothing but what is praiseworthy and holy. We surrender our hearts without a suspicion, much less a struggle ; and so great is our readiness, that our own seeming zeal for salvation and perfection pleases us. As a matter of fact, however, this enthusiastic fervor for holy things often comes from the same sort of tendency that makes worldlings become attached to profane objects. We find many

persons so bent on their own wills with regard to pious practices and so jealous about the slightest outer or inner spiritual consolation, that, when God allows the least interruption of their enjoyment, they become as troubled and distressed, as unquiet and ill-humored, as worldlings whose pleasures and amusements have been interfered with. And there are still other attachments, more deep and subtle and productive of results that would amaze you.

*Q.* I implore you to tell me at least something about them.

*A.* Well, then, let me begin by outlining the doctrine of the mystics. They say that whenever self-love causes an attachment to some object, at once all the different passions quietly introduce themselves into the soul. Thus, in many persons we may discover spiritual ambition, spiritual avarice, spiritual sensuality and a thousand other inordinate movements of that self-love whose very name indicates that its chief characteristic is to appropriate everything and attach itself to everything. The Bishop of Meaux,<sup>1</sup> when speaking of spiritual detachment, is in perfect agreement with St. Francis de Sales who says: "After we have divested ourselves of human and selfish affection for the practice of virtue, we must be clothed again with a new affection which will make us cherish virtues, not because they are agreeable, honorable and pleasing

<sup>1</sup> 1. VIII, § 14.

to self-love, but because they are acceptable to God and conducive to His greater honor and glory.”<sup>2</sup>

Q. Why are some spiritual persons scandalized at hearing that we must be detached even from objects of a spiritual character, whether human or divine?

A. Because they have never fathomed the doctrine taught or insinuated in a hundred passages of the *Imitation*. That little book devotes several whole chapters to the treatment of “mystical death,” which is really nothing but entire detachment from self for the sake of acquiring exclusive attachment to God, by loving everything solely or chiefly for his sake in a pure spirit of faith.

Q. Must we counsel everybody to practice this detachment?

A. No; it concerns only persons who are actually attached to spiritual things. Worldlings are affected in quite another way. When this attachment is mentioned in a book or alluded to in sermons, worldlings realize that the words do not apply to them. Indeed, for them, the imperfection now under discussion would be more like a perfection. Article XXXIV of Issy states expressly that “beginners and the perfect are to be guided by different rules according to their different states; and the perfect understand Christian teaching more deeply and more sublimely.” Moreover, this spiritual detachment is by no means

<sup>2</sup> *Treatise on the Love of God.* Bk. IX, ch. 16.

the same thing as indifference to salvation or to spiritual welfare; it consists in being so thoroughly detached that we love everything for the sake of God and because He so wills, rather than for our own sake or for selfish interests.

*Q.* But does not St. Paul tell all Christians to sigh for the most perfect gifts; to strive unceasingly for all virtue and holiness; and always to aspire to the loftiest places in the kingdom of Heaven?

*A.* Yes, of course; but all this must be done in the way ordained by God, namely, by attaching ourselves to Him alone, by loving nothing except in Him and for Him, and by appropriating nothing as exclusively or chiefly our own. God wishes, and indeed, deserves, that we should love Him more than we love any creatures, whether human or superhuman, ourselves included. This does not mean that we must cease to love ourselves, but rather that our love of self must never be inordinate.

*Q.* But this thoroughly detached and unselfish love is the pure love proper to perfect souls, is it not?

*A.* Yes, when it becomes continual, habitual and predominant; as Bossuet teaches.<sup>1</sup> Essentially though, it is the same as the charity common to all, which varies only in degree and not in kind. But see how far Bossuet goes in demanding of perfect souls complete detachment from selfish interests. "The work of

<sup>1</sup> *Préface sur l'Instruction pastorale*, § 96.

perfection," he says, "consists in a constant effort to refer — not spiritual goods nor the means of salvation, but — our salvation and everlasting happiness to the glory of God." <sup>1</sup> This, he adds, is what he always taught in the "Instruction on the States of Prayer," following St. Paul who tells us to refer our salvation to the praise of divine grace and the glory of God. <sup>2</sup>

In other words, we must love our salvation and everlasting happiness more for the glory it will give to God and the praise it will reflect on His grace than for the great benefit it will bring us. Note that this is the teaching of a bishop the farthest of all from being suspected of false spirituality. Now let those who aspire to perfection, — as every Christian should, — mention a single spiritual good to which they may lawfully become attached; let them name the divine favor or grace or consolation or good deed on which they may reflect with a little complacency and self-love! Surely every such thing must needs be referred to God; because we must love everything mainly on account of Him Who is absolutely the last end of everything.

Q. But is not this doctrine a little too fine and lofty?

A. Our bishops do not think so; since, in Article XVII of Issy, they expressly declare that all reflection

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, § 93.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. I, 6.



upon our own gifts or graces is evil and dangerous if calculated to nourish self-love, to provide human support, or to direct too much attention toward self. This, of course, is not meant to exclude necessary or salutary reflections.

*Q.* Be it so then. And now tell me! When the spiritual persons you speak of have been enlightened by God about this important but unfamiliar truth, what do they discover in their deeds, words and interior acts?

*A.* An abyss of misery and corruption which gives rise to bad and dangerous thoughts as natural and almost as frequent as the breath we draw. Father Surin says that God, by means of an inner divine illumination, acts upon the soul like the rays of the sun. When these shine through a window they illuminate countless atoms floating in the air and hitherto invisible. Happy the soul that God deigns thus to enlighten on the infinite mysteries of the interior life! Oh, how soon will that soul be relieved of the subtle poison of self-esteem, secret presumption, and self-complacency! What depths of diffidence and humility will it not discover in this experimental knowledge of a corruption heretofore unsuspected.

*Q.* What does God do to purify good souls of this secret corruption, and of disguised, or spiritualized, selfishness?

*A.* The revelation of the evil is the beginning of

the cure. To let the soul groan for a long time under this humiliating burden is the continuation of the treatment. Finally God subjects the soul to new and terrible trials, just as we put gold back into the crucible over and over again, to purify it more. "As gold in the furnace, He hath proved them."<sup>1</sup> He makes them pass through the fire of tribulation and the water of interior anguish. The mystics say that the repetition of trials is an infallible indication of impurities remaining in the soul; and that the severity of our trials usually indicates God's intention of purifying us thoroughly in order to raise us to a sublime degree of union and holiness.

Q. How must our trials be borne in order that all these precious results may be obtained?

A. Almost as the first trials were borne; that is to say, with complete abandonment. It is only the making of reserves with God that stops the course of His grace and impedes His divine operations. Moreover, we must have absolute confidence in God alone, since, when we seek consolation or support elsewhere, new trials become necessary and our suffering is prolonged.

Q. Tell me the chief result of the purification effected by these new trials.

A. We attain the unselfishness of perfect love; and we are set free from the bondage of self-love with

<sup>1</sup> *Wisdom*, III, 6.

its restless worry, its anxiety, its incessant fear about salvation, progress and everlasting happiness. This freedom results from our seeking mainly or exclusively the holy will of God and generously abandoning the outcome to Him. Bossuet says that only by means of this complete abandonment can we find in God perfect peace of heart and assurance of salvation, because only when we entrust the result to Him can we be certain of success. Our weak, inconstant wills must be set in the firm, immovable and all-powerful will of God.<sup>1</sup>

Souls who have attained to this state count it one of their greatest graces that they have been enabled to abandon to God all their spiritual and eternal, as well as their material, temporal interests. They say that they thoroughly appreciate the terrible risk they would have to run if God were to make them mainly responsible for their own salvation. They are infinitely better satisfied to remain in His hands and to trust Him than to rely upon their own weak and uncertain wills. Even as it is, they would tremble and lose heart if they were not constantly supported and sustained by firm confidence in the will of God.

Oh my God! How admirably do Thy divine perfections accord with one another and with our interests. While on the one hand Thy sovereign and universal dominion requires us to abandon ourselves

<sup>1</sup> 1. IX, § 18.

blindly to all that Thou art pleased to effect in us, whether now or in eternity; on the other hand, Thy supreme goodness provides us with a constant assurance of finding again in Thee all that we have been led to abandon out of respect or confidence towards Thee.

Q. I suppose that after this there remains nothing to do except to perfect this heroic renunciation and complete abandonment; surely, no other attachment has still to be sacrificed?

A. The most delicate and lasting, the one which is the dearest, and at the same time the most hidden of all, still remains. It is what the mystics call attachment to the proprietary use of our faculties.

Q. Will you not kindly explain the meaning of this mystical phrase?

A. As you know, the faculties of the soul are simply God's three gifts, — intellect, memory and will, — given to be used solely for His honor and in a manner pleasing to Him. Now, we are said to be "attached to the proprietary use of our faculties" when we employ these gifts to attain God, but in a way harmonizing with our own judgment and pleasure rather than with the divine will. Thus do good souls betray their love of "proprietorship," even in the holiest use of faculties which are consecrated and devoted to God in substance but not in mode of action. God, however, wants all, as He deserves all.

Q. But why should people make reserves so trifling in a sacrifice so great?

A. Anyone well acquainted with the human heart will easily understand the reason why ; but only those who have attempted this supreme renunciation can realize its extreme and lasting difficulty. Self-love, you know, fears nothing so much as its own destruction, and, wishing to live a little for itself, tries to limit as much as it can the sacrifices offered to God by the soul. It is continually dictating a thousand little reserves. In these it finds nourishment and life. Thus it seeks its own advantage, or rather seeks some reserve for itself in what is being offered to God. But divine love, which wishes to reign alone in the human heart, is ever battling with its arch enemy; for God is a jealous lover. He is not satisfied with demanding a constant accounting from us ; He wishes that even our abandonment should depend wholly on His will, His spirit, His grace. And this dependence must extend not merely to the inner acts of our faculties but even to our way of acting ; for frequently God wishes things done in another way than that which would please us.

Q. Will you explain this a little further?

A. Ordinarily God wishes that the acts performed by advanced souls should differ from those of beginners. He requires of the advanced only simple actual dispositions of mind and heart, that is, that they

should intend all that He wills and in the way He wills. But lingering self-love is dissatisfied with the simplicity and unity of these direct acts; it feels extreme and continual repugnance to perform acts which are not at all, or only very indistinctly, perceived. The soul is constantly longing to return to its old way of acting, namely to elicit reflex, conscious and easily perceptible acts. This way offers a lingering satisfaction, a last resource, which we are never willing to relinquish, because it is the last human prop that supports the little edifice of natural selfish life. Yet this edifice must be all destroyed before we can live in Jesus Christ with a new life, wholly supernatural and divine. For this reason in Article XVII already quoted, our bishops absolutely condemned as bad and dangerous, "every conscious act and every reflection apt to nourish self-love or to provide human support."

Q. Do you know why God ordinarily wishes such souls to use only these simple acts?

A. The first reason given by the mystics is that this simplicity implies the most perfect renunciation and dying to self. During dry and distateful prayer, we seem to be, as it were, cut off from ourselves, deprived of all perceptible life of mind or heart, robbed alike of the sweetness of simple recollection and of the consolation of performing reflex and visible acts as formerly. Rarely do we find a soul so dead to self as

to wish for no other support than God alone in the darkness and nakedness of faith.

A second reason given by the mystics is this: the less a soul complicates itself by reflex acts, the less disproportion will there be between it and the infinitely Simple Being to Whom it must be united. The more a soul is divested of all sensible things (i. e. made naked in spirit and in faith), the nearer it approaches God's purity of spirit; and consequently, the more perfect will its union become, since the dissimilarity between God and the soul will have been further diminished. This indicates the meaning of that mystical sentence in the *Imitation*: "Forsake all and thou shalt find all."

And now, if you have any more questions, reserve them for the next dialogue, as this one is already too long.



## TENTH DIALOGUE.

### Continuation of the Same Subject.

Q. From what you have said of this spiritual nakedness, this stripping of the soul, I infer that it is apt to be mistaken for a sign of spiritual retrogression, instead of progress.

A. Just so. The most dangerous and most frequent error of the souls in question is the supposition that progress in perfection can be measured by growth in sensible devotion, by increase of satisfaction or of facility in ordinary deeds and practices of piety, by visible gain in heavenly graces, gifts and favors. True, the progress of beginners is usually measured thus; but the advanced generally go along in a different fashion, namely, by the road of self-denial and of death to all creatures, however holy. Now, lest they should be fatally discouraged by the very things which should encourage them, they must learn God's ordinary way of dealing with advanced souls. Usually His graces are disguised; and divine union is perfected in nakedness of faith and purity of spirit. "David referred to this perfect purity of spirit," remarks Cassian, as quoted by Bossuet,<sup>1</sup> "when he

<sup>1</sup> 1. V, § 21.

said: 'The poor and the needy shall praise Thy name.'"<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, with many fathers and great doctors, gives the same interpretation to the words of the Gospel: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."<sup>2</sup>

*Q.* But we have seen and still see many holy souls enriched with graces and sensible favors, and sometimes even with most glorious gifts.

*A.* Undoubtedly. But they have already passed through all the degrees of stripping, purification and death to creatures. Or else God, by an extraordinary and all-powerful grace, has perhaps suddenly placed them in perfect nakedness of mind and heart, without making them experience real sensible poverty. You must know, however, that it is harder to be perfectly detached amid spiritual riches than for a wealthy man to possess the virtue of poverty.

*Q.* What should be our ordinary attitude toward God, when we are reduced to this blessed poverty and simplicity of spirit?

*A.* A constant readiness to discover and to follow the various movements of grace. But we should never try to forestall grace, to act in any other way than it suggests, or to go any farther than it impels. All this demands infinite attention and fidelity on our part.

*Q.* Must we wait for a special impulse to perform each duty of our state of life?

<sup>1</sup> Ps. LXXIII, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. V, 3.

A. Not at all. Whatever we are bound to do, whether by general or by particular obligation, is expressly willed by God. Hence, it should be performed exactly and faithfully. Ordinary grace, which is never wanting, suffices for this; and no one is more attentive to duty than persons accustomed to act from the purest motives and with supernatural dispositions.

Q. In what then does their continual dependence upon God consist?

A. In this: they are no longer seeking to occupy their minds with Him according to their own will and choice, in a pleasant, consoling, sensible way. They merely keep themselves in God's presence, with a simple readiness to accept whatever happens by His will. In a word, they are in an attitude well described by the Royal Prophet's comparison of a servant whose eyes are always fixed on her mistress, not from eager desire for action, but only in order to be ready to act.<sup>1</sup> The servant is not impatiently awaiting the moment when her natural activity can be loosened, but, on the contrary, is repressing that activity so as always to be in readiness to obey even the merest glance of an eye. It may be added that our present advice can mislead no one, since none but the advanced will be able to practise, or even to comprehend it.

Q. What great benefits will result if advanced souls keep themselves in these dispositions?

A. The benefits cannot be described. When God

<sup>1</sup> Ps. CXXII, 2.

finds a soul completely divested of its own will, even in the holiest use of its faculties; when He sees in it neither inclination nor preference except for the free action of the Holy Spirit; then He proceeds to act. With every obstacle removed, and with the soul co-operating, God works in His own peculiar way, —the way that accords best with the dispositions of a heart thus upright, simple, dead to self, and full of confidence and abandonment.

*Q.* Is it easy to keep one's self in these dispositions?

*A.* It is; if, in addition to a general call, we have been actually invited by a sensible attraction. The condition is so sweet and agreeable that we remain in it, even during our hours of activity, almost as well as during the time of prayer. Nobody would exchange this condition for one of freely chosen interior activity, unless he were either very poorly instructed, or excessively jealous of his liberty, or extremely faithless to grace.

But suppose that we have received only a general call to this kind of prayer; and that, at the same time, our minds are active, unmortified, or wearied and troubled with a thousand vain fears. In that case, we shall need heroic courage in order to be constantly faithful during these frequent painful visitations of grace. Or, in lieu of courage, we must have an abandonment so perfect and so rare, as to surpass that

possessed by the venerable Mother de Chantal. She complained to her holy director: "I feel that I try to make too many acts of divine union; and that it would be better for me to remain simply united with God. I receive interior reproaches for doing as I have done; and I know that my infidelities do me harm."<sup>1</sup> This shows how difficult constant fidelity must sometimes be, even in the case of souls that have already made great progress.

*Q.* What causes this difficulty?

*A.* One or another form of inordinate self-love. Sometimes it is our love of liberty, our impatience at being fettered in simple interior dispositions as in a prison. Again, it is our natural activity which lives upon action and movement, and cannot long content itself with simple waiting. Sometimes again, it is attachment to our own will, for, until our will is conquered, we regard it as an intolerable slavery to be subjected at all, but especially permanently, to the will of another. Or still again, it may be attachment to our own judgment which despises everything done in contradiction to itself, and considers as lost every moment spent in a way it disapproves of. Or finally, it may be a strong attachment to natural life, an attachment which is almost never broken, because we find it so hard to renounce all that personal activity which constitutes the very existence of mind and heart.

<sup>1</sup> *Vie*, pt. III, ch. 4.

These are the causes of greater or less infidelity to the graces of our state. So, after having a hundred times protested to God that we abandon ourselves entirely to Him and depend on His spirit and grace in all things, still we often return to the self that we have abandoned, and we decide not to die quite so completely as to retain nothing which gives us pleasure and delight.

*Q.* How, and under what pretext, do we thus wretchedly return to self and hinder the complete death of self-love?

*A.* By departing from the path of simplicity, under a hundred different pretexts. Sometimes we declare that we wish to excite pious sentiments in our souls. And so we act strenuously, or unseasonably, or against our inspirations, simply for the sake of getting back to what appeals to the senses. Poverty of spirit and naked faith are as distasteful to us as the manna in the desert was to the Israelites.

Sometimes we withdraw from the path of simplicity in order, as we say, to revive our first fervor by resuming our former practices. At present, God is demanding something else, something more simple and more perfect; but that makes no difference to us. The other things are more to our liking, and we return to them again, against the advice of our directors, and even despite the fact that before now, God has punished us for acting thus, and has made us realize the

futility of such a proceeding. But we persist; because we are unhappy and discontented, until we find an appearance of sensible aid.

At other times, we declare that we must find out where we are and what we are doing. So, despite frequent interior reproaches, and merely because we want to make sure of everything, we continue to indulge in endless reflections and to disturb our peace of soul. Grace is crying out, "Abandon yourself to God, and you will find real certainty;" but nature is shouting, "Make sure, yourself." And we heed nature rather than grace.

In one word, it may be said that almost everybody seeks those miserable supports condemned in article XVII of Issy. Souls seem to rely much more upon the visible and sensible element than upon the holy and simple dispositions in which God places them and wherein He wishes them to remain peacefully until they receive a new command; that is, until He either gives them a new touch of recollection, or lets them acquire it without trouble or eagerness.

Q. What is the result of this seeking for human support?

A. It tends to nourish, or to revive, self-love by making us think continually of ourselves, instead of attending to God alone, as He moves us and counsels us, through our directors, to do. He is steadily calling the soul to a new life into which it cannot



enter until, as St. Paul says, it is dead to everything and buried with Jesus Christ. In this new life, the mystics teach, we must be lost in God, in order henceforward to lead a life entirely supernatural and divine.

*Q.* What induces this dying to self, this being lost in God, this living of a new life in Him?

*A.* It comes only after we have learned to forget ourselves and to attend only to God and things connected with Him. Little by little, through various movements of grace, we are brought not only to comprehend, but to feel and to realize that this living for self, this referring of everything to self, the leading the life of the "old man," is in reality a cruel and lasting slavery. For, by clinging to everything and desiring everything for self, we become enslaved to everything; and all the more enslaved, the more tenaciously we cling. On the other hand, our living for God alone, and our referring all to God, according to the "new man," implies our clinging to nothing except God, either in time or in eternity. This is the supernatural and divine life wherein, through Jesus Christ, we enjoy the perfect liberty of the children of God, together with perfect repose in the present life, and as much assurance of eternal life as is allowed to anyone.

*Q.* And then what follows?

*A.* Another still more perfect and delightful state

which consists not so much in knowing by the strong light of faith, as in realizing by the heart's sweet sentiment, that God is even more present in my soul than in my body, that He is its light and its life, and consequently, that He is the soul of my soul. In very deed, my God is all mine; as I should be all His. So I renounce my old accursed self; I put my God in place of it, since I must love Him more than myself. Henceforth, He will be my true self, in whom alone I wish to live; since we live truly only in the one object that we love above all others. But what am I saying? O my God! can we ever more truly live for self than when we live only for Thee! Consoling thought! But I will not dwell upon it, lest I revive the old love of my accursed self; for I now wish no other love than Thee alone, O my God, who art all mine; as I am and desire to be, all Thine.

Q. Do the souls in question often make acts so distinct and conscious as this?

A. They do, whenever God gives them the impulse and the facility. When the impulse ceases, at once they generously renounce the sweet consolation of these tender movements toward God, and, entering into themselves, remain at peace in their ordinary simple dispositions. They depart from these dispositions only at the time and in the manner that God pleases,—as ships that have entered port set out again only when a favorable wind is blowing.

Q. What makes these souls so pliant and flexible in God's hands?

A. To make them like this, it has been necessary that, even in the holiest use of their faculties, their wills should have been crossed, broken, conquered and brought into subjection to the will of God, hundreds and hundreds of times over; that great emptiness of mind, frequent and long sustained, should almost entirely have eliminated their natural activity; that continued distressing inability to perform the slightest conscious or distinctly perceptible act should have forced them back to direct acts, to simple dispositions, and should have taught them to be content when God pleases thus to reduce their souls to poverty and nakedness. Some souls have had to pass through many other trials and through a hundred interior agonies.

Q. What do you call interior agonies?

A. Feelings of terror, like those of a dying man who, at various moments, seems to be on the very point of expiring. These come upon the souls in question whenever, by a special grace, although without perceptible light or fervor, they are inwardly urged to abandon themselves to God in the deepest obscurity of faith; for they see no interior support to sustain them during the agony caused by the sight of this frightful abyss of abandonment. It seems at the time, as if they were about to be swallowed up and

lost, and even destroyed by some invisible hand. The sensation is as terrifying as that of a man adrift on a great ocean, out of whose hands is snatched the single plank that formed his support and his last resource. Those who, instead of having passed through these impressions of terror, mortal agony, and interior annihilation, have never even conceived of the terrible conditions of perfect abandonment in pure faith, cannot begin to understand what I am trying to say. It is not for them, but for certain other souls, that I am speaking. May God be forever praised for the wonderful effects that He has produced in them.

*Q.* When God bestows an impulse towards conscious reflex acts and a facility for them, are they performed in the ordinary way?

*A.* No; usually they are performed in a very special manner, as St. Francis de Sales shows so well by saying to one of his spiritual daughters. "Hereafter, let your acts be, as it were, melted, drawn, distilled from the apex of the mind, so that they will penetrate farther into the substance of your soul. It can be done if you are simple and docile."<sup>1</sup> So true is this that we find souls who, after their colloquies with God, recall nothing except perhaps that God has manifested to them some opportunity for zeal. This shows how completely all has taken place between spirit and spirit, and in a way far removed from the senses.

<sup>1</sup> *Reliq.*, pt. I. p. 99.

Q. How, then, can we be sure that we are making explicit acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, thanksgiving, petition, and all the acts which, as Bossuet teaches, and as you have said, should be made at suitable times?

A. This is how he and the other bishops explain it in article XIII. "In the most perfect life and in the most perfect prayer, all these acts are summed up in charity alone, inasmuch as charity inspires all the virtues and commands the exercise of them according to St. Paul's saying: *Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*<sup>1</sup> He might with equal truth have said the same of the various other Christian acts, all of which charity dictates the distinct practice of, although such practice may not always be sensibly and distinctly perceived." This should give great consolation to the souls in question, and to their directors also.

Q. No doubt we receive many favors in this state of perfect life and perfect prayer?

A. As you are scarcely ready to believe, with the Quietists, that anyone is absolutely perfect, I presume you refer to those who have really entered into the vast region of saintly perfection wherein even the best souls must continue to advance until the very last moment of the longest life. Well, even at the beginning of this new and supernatural life, we receive indescribable favors; for the Divine nature, — in-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. XIII, 7.

finitely more diffusive than the sunlight which radiates in every direction until it encounters an obstacle, — loves nothing so much as to pour itself into every soul unselfish enough to receive divine favors without corrupting them by means of pride and self-love.

Q. Are these favors and consolations like the ones mentioned above?

A. No; they are as different as the present state of these souls is different from the previous state. You see with what admirable wisdom everything is arranged. Sensible consolations are bestowed upon those who, being still in the world of the senses, relish no other kind of consolation; but those who, by walking in the spirit of pure faith, have become thoroughly spiritualized and simple, receive interior consolations which are perfectly spiritual, heavenly and divine. These latter consolations are called the delights of a pure spirit and a pure love, because they are the result of pure love alone and can be experienced only by a pure spirit. None but those who have tasted them can understand them, discuss them, or even endure them; for often they become a very torrent of pleasure, filling the soul and overflowing the senses.

Q. How is the soul purified and refined so as to appreciate these purely spiritual delights?

A. Almost in the same way that the tastes of a coarse sensual man are refined in worldly affairs. If we wish to give such a one a taste for intellectual

pleasures, we first deprive him of his former satisfactions and then gradually substitute the new kind.

Q. Is it the same way with the lights that illumine the mind?

A. Yes, for in this state, everything is in proportion. Excepting certain rare occasions when sudden flashes give a deep insight into the mysteries of faith, the lights which are given are penetrating and effective, but not very brilliant. They are wholly divine; but they are almost imperceptible to the feelings. Nevertheless, they guide and direct everything; they assist our soul in its trials; and later on, we begin to realize that we have been enlightened and sustained, though we cannot tell how. In avoiding evil and doing good, we have been aided as by an invisible hand which has lent us a support more powerful and lasting than was ever supplied by our former sensible fervor. All this help really comes from the light of pure faith in God who never changes as creatures do.

Q. And is it the same with interior peace?

A. Most certainly. This peace grows deeper and deeper, until at last it becomes fathomless like the ocean. It is no longer confined to the senses but overflows and goes beyond them? As St. Paul says, it transcends all feeling. "May the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding (sense), keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup> It is to be found then,

<sup>1</sup> Philipp. IV, 7.



not in the senses, but in the depths of mind and heart; or, as the mystics say, in the center of the soul, and the apex of the mind. And it is perfectly imperturbable. It can be expelled neither by external vicissitudes, which these souls scarcely feel at all, nor by internal revolutions; because it proceeds from a total abandonment to the supreme will of God and is accompanied with perfect confidence in His all-powerful goodness.

*Q.* Do souls always advance and progress in the way and in the order you have described?

*A.* Oh, no! What has been said is true only in a general way and only with reference to persons constantly faithful. God may change all this, whenever He pleases, being able to alter and reverse everything without confusion or disorder. Then again, very few people are constantly faithful to grace; and so, in order to accommodate Himself to our weakness and misery, as He is ever doing, He alters His method of guidance in a hundred different ways, varying the movements of His grace so as to allow for our variations. This is always done so mercifully that even the worst mistakes and infidelities are made to conduce to the perfection of chosen souls. With Him and like Him, we too, without changing anything essential, should regard the individual soul as at once a beginner, a proficient and an adept in spiritual things; for at one and the same time, a

single soul may participate in the characteristics of all three states.

To discern these things properly, however, is the business of a director; our duty is to render humble and blind obedience which can never mislead those who submit to the minister of God as to God Himself.

## Conclusion.

Q. What is the principal fruit that can and should be gathered from these instructions?

A. The same as what may be learned from the "Pastoral Instruction" which has been the subject of our conversations.

Q. What aim, then, had Bossuet in view when preparing his "Instruction"?

A. He tells in the preface of his book: "The simple and the timid will be drawn to prayer; and those already conversant with it will hesitate less to follow the divine attraction. God knows it is not from myself, but from the doctrine of the saints and the power of truth, that I look for these beneficial results." <sup>1</sup>

Q. What still remains to be done in order to secure these results?

A. Two things: First, always to remember that it was by a total cessation of acts towards God that the holy repose of prayer was abused; and that this is precisely the error which, as Bossuet said, has turned and can still turn people into Quietists. Secondly, always to remember that, in attempting to dispose ourselves for the simple prayer of recollection, by the

<sup>1</sup> Préf., § 9.

practice of the four kinds of purity and of attentive pauses during all our prayers and meditations, we must never depart from our usual method except when God Himself draws us by certain interior touches and divine attractions ; and that even then, we must leave the question of the proper method to be decided by those whom God has given us as guides.

*Q.* And now a last request. Can you not refer me to some spiritual book which will show me how to put these instructions of yours into practice?

*A.* Yes, indeed. Divine Providence has put into my hands just such a book as you desire. It is a method of practising the presence of God, composed by Bossuet for the use of the Visitandines of Meaux. Madame de Bassompierre who was made Superioress at Meaux through the influence of Cardinal de Bissi, afterwards returned to Nancy and carried with her a copy of this precious manuscript. What I have here is an exact transcript of the Nancy manuscript and corresponds with other copies that have been published in various French cities, as an appendix to a little book called "The Practice of the Presence of God."

## APPENDIX.<sup>1</sup>

### A Short and Easy Method of making the Prayer of Faith, and of the Simple Presence of God.

BY BOSSUET.

1st. We must accustom ourselves to nourish our soul with a simple and loving thought of God, and of Jesus Christ, our Lord; and to this end we must quietly relinquish all discourse, reasoning, and manifold affections, in order to keep our souls in simplicity, respect, and attention, and thus approach nearer and nearer to God, our sole and sovereign good, our first principle, and our last end.

2d. The perfection of this life consists in union with our Sovereign Good; and the greater our simplicity, the more perfect our union. It is for this reason that those who would be perfect are interiorly solicited by grace to become simple, that they may finally be capable of enjoying the *one thing* necessary—that is, eternal unity. Then let us frequently say, in the depth of our hearts: *O unum necessarium, unum volo, unum quaero, unum mihi est necessarium, Deus meus et omnia.* (Oh, one thing necessary! Thee alone do I wish, do I seek, do I desire! Thou art all that I need, O my God and my all!)

<sup>1</sup> Transcribed almost literally from Appendix III. of Miss McMahon's translation of "Abandonment." New York, Benziger Bros.

3d. Meditation is very good in its time, and very useful at the beginning of the spiritual life; but we must not stop at it, since the soul by fidelity to mortification, and recollection, usually receives a purer and more intimate form of prayer, which may be called the prayer of "simplicity." This consists in a simple and loving attention, or contemplation of some divine object, either of God himself or of some of His perfections, or of Jesus Christ or of some of His mysteries, or of some other of the Christian truths. Then the soul, abandoning all reasoning, falls into a sweet contemplation which keeps it tranquil, attentive, and susceptible of the operations and the divine impressions which the Holy Spirit communicates to it: it does little, and receives much; its labor is sweet, and yet most fruitful; and as it approaches nearer to the source of all light, all grace, all virtue, it also receives more of these.

4th. The practice of this prayer should begin at our awakening by an act of faith in the presence of God, who is everywhere, and in Jesus Christ, whose eyes never leave us though we were buried in the centre of the earth. This act is made sensibly, in the usual manner; for example, by saying interiorly, "I believe that my God is present;" or by a simple thought of faith in God present with us, which is a purer and more spiritual act.

5th. Then we must not endeavor to multiply, or

produce several other acts or various dispositions, but remain simply attentive to this presence of God, exposed to this divine radiance, thus continuing this devout attention or exposition as long as God gives us the grace to do it, without being eager to make other acts than those with which we are inspired, since this prayer is a prayer with God alone, and a union which over and above contains all the other special dispositions; and which disposes the soul to passiveness; so that God, so to say, becomes sole master of its interior, and there effects more special work. The less the creature labors in this state, the more powerfully God acts in it; and since the operation of God is a repose, the soul, in this prayer, becomes in a manner like Him, and receives, also, marvellous effects; and as the rays of the sun cause the plants to grow and to blossom and to bear fruit, so the attentive soul, exposed in tranquillity to the rays of the divine Sun of justice, more effectually imbibes the divine influences which enrich it with all virtues.

6th. The continuation of this attention in faith will serve it as thanksgiving for all the graces received during the night, and throughout its life, as an offering of itself and all its actions, as a direction of its intention, etc.

7th. The soul may fear to lose much by the omission of other acts, but experience will teach it, that on the contrary, it gains a great deal; for the



greater its knowledge of God, the greater also will be the purity of its love and its intentions, the greater will be its detestation of sin, and the greater and more continual its recollection, mortification, and humility.

8th. This will not prevent it from making other interior or exterior acts of virtue when it feels itself impelled thereto by grace; but the fundamental and usual state of its interior should be one of union with God which will keep it abandoned to His hands, delivered up to His love, and ready quietly to accomplish all His will.

9th. The time of meditation being come, we must begin with great respect by a simple recollection of God, invoking His Spirit, and uniting ourselves intimately with Jesus Christ; and then continue in this same way. It will be the same with our vocal prayers, the office, and the Holy Sacrifice, whether we celebrate it or assist at it. Even the examination of conscience should be made after no other method; this same light which keeps our attention upon God will cause us to discover our slightest imperfections, and deeply deplore and regret them. We should go to table with the same spirit of simplicity, which will keep us more occupied with God than with the repast, and leave us free to give better attention to what is being read. This practice binds us to nothing but to keep our soul detached from all imperfection, and attached only to God and intimately united with Him, — in which state consists all our welfare.

10th. We should take our recreation in the same disposition, relaxing the body and mind but not permitting ourselves the dissipation of curious news, immoderate laughter, or any indiscreet word; always keeping ourselves pure and free interiorly without disturbing others, frequently uniting ourselves to God by a simple and loving thought of Him, ever remembering that we are in His presence, and that He does not wish us to be separated at any moment from Him and His holy will. The most ordinary rule of this state of simplicity and the sovereign disposition of the soul is to do the will of God in all things. To regard all as coming from God and to go from all to God, is what sustains and fortifies the soul in all its occupations and experiences, and maintains us in the possession of simplicity. Then let us always follow the will of God, after the example of Jesus Christ, and united to Him as our Head. This is an excellent means of making progress in this manner of prayer, and of attaining through it to the most solid virtue and the most perfect sanctity.

11th. We should console ourselves in the same manner, and preserve this simple and intimate union with God in all our actions—in the parlor, in the cell, at table, at recreation. Let us add, that in all our intercourse we should endeavor to edify our neighbor, by taking advantage of every occasion to lead one another to piety, the love of God, and the practice of good

works, in order that we may diffuse the good odor of Jesus Christ. If any man speak, says St. Peter,<sup>1</sup> let him speak as the words of God, that is as if God spoke through him. To do this, it suffices to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; He will inspire you as to that which is simply and unaffectedly suitable at all times.

Finally, we shall finish the day by animating with the sentiment of this holy presence our examen, evening prayer, and preparations for rest; and we shall go to sleep in this state of loving attention, interspersing our rest, when we awake during the night, with a few fervent words, full of unction, like so many transports, or cries of the heart to God. As for example: My God, be all things to me! I desire only Thee for time and eternity; Lord, who is like unto Thee? My Lord and my God; my God and my all!

12th. It must be remarked that this true simplicity makes us live in a state of continual death to self and of perfect detachment, by causing us to go with the utmost directness to God without stopping at any creature. But this grace of simplicity is not obtained by speculation, but by great purity of heart, and true mortification and contempt of self. He who avoids sufferings and humiliations, and refuses to die to self, will never have any part in it. This is why there are so few who advance herein; for few indeed are willing to leave themselves, and in consequence they

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. IV. 11.

endure immense losses, and deprive themselves of incomprehensible blessings. O happy souls who spare nothing to belong wholly to God! Happy religious who faithfully follow all the observances of their institute! Through this fidelity they die continually to self, to their own judgment, to their own will, to their inclinations and natural repugnances, and are thus admirably though unconsciously disposed for this excellent method of prayer. There is nothing more hidden than the life of a religious who follows in all things the observances and ordinary exercises of his or her community, giving no exterior manifestation of anything extraordinary: it is a life which is a complete and continual death; through it the kingdom of God is established in us, and all other things are liberally given us.

13th. We should not neglect the reading of spiritual books; but we should read with simplicity, and in a spirit of prayer, and not through curious research. We read in a spirit of prayer when we permit the lights and sentiments revealed to us through the reading to be imprinted on our souls, and when this impression is made by the presence of God rather than by our own industry.

14th. We must be armed, moreover, with two or three maxims: first, that a devout person without prayer is a body without a soul; secondly, that there can be no true and solid prayer without mortification,

without recollection, or without humility; thirdly, that we need perseverance, never to be disheartened by the difficulties we shall encounter in this exercise.

15th. It must be borne in mind that one of the greatest secrets of the spiritual life is that the Holy Spirit guides us therein, not only by lights, sweetness, consolations, and attractions, but also by obscurities, darkness, insensibility, contradictions, anguish, revolts of the passions, and inclinations. I say, moreover, that this way of the Cross is necessary; that it is good; that it is the surest way, and that it leads us most rapidly to perfection. An enlightened soul dearly appreciates the guidance of God, which permits it to be tried by creatures and overwhelmed with temptations and neglect; and it fully understands that these things are favors rather than misfortunes, preferring to die on the cross on Calvary rather than to live in sweetness on Thabor. Experience will teach it in time the truth of these beautiful words: *Et nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis; et mea nox obscurum non habet; sed omnia in luce clarescunt.*<sup>1</sup> (And night shall be my light in my pleasures, and my night knoweth no darkness, but all things shine in light.) The soul, after its purification in the Purgatory of suffering through which it must necessarily pass, will enjoy light, rest, and joy through intimate union with God, who will make this world of exile a paradise for it. The

<sup>1</sup> Ps. CXXXVIII, 11.

best prayer is that in which we most freely abandon ourselves to the sentiments and dispositions which God gives us, and in which we study with most simplicity, humility, and fidelity to conform ourselves to His will and to the example of Jesus Christ.













